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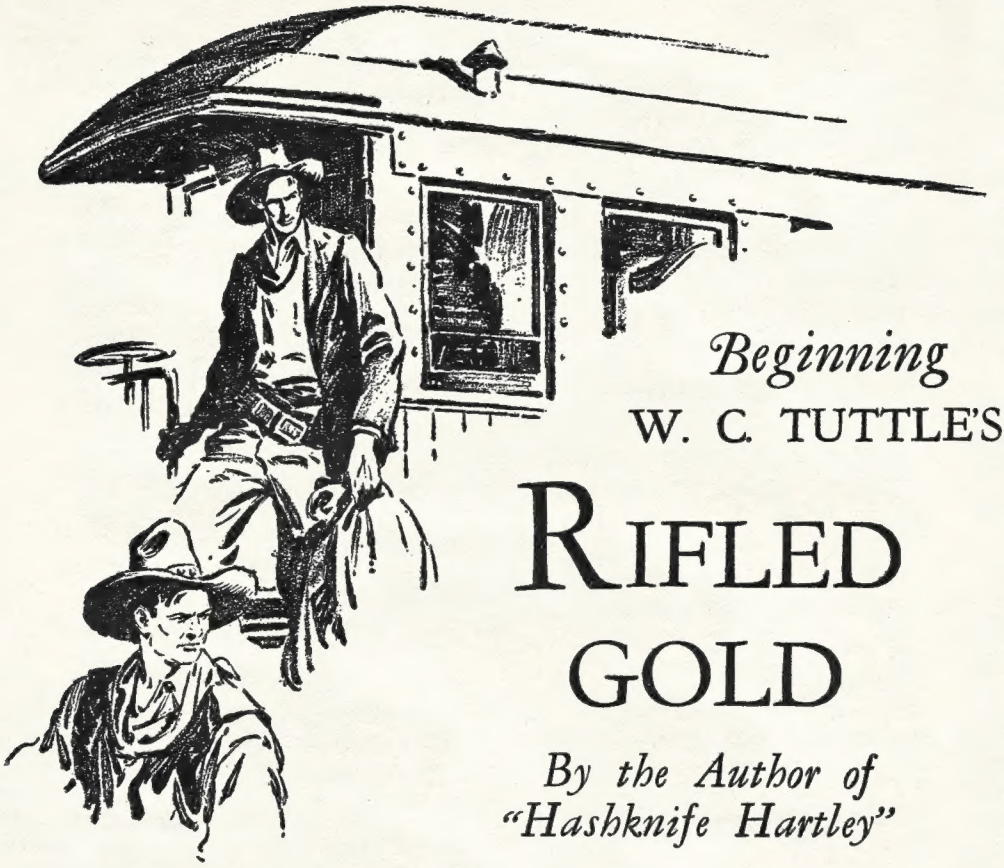


Beginning

W. C. TUTTLE'S

RIFLED GOLD

By the Author of "Hashknife Hartley"

CHAPTER I

THE COWPUNCHERS OF DISASTER

THE first telegram was sent to Elene Corey, Chicago, Illinois. It had been dispatched by her mother from Painted Wells, Arizona. With the brevity common to tragedy, it read:

YOUR FATHER KILLED TODAY STOP ADVISE YOU COME AT ONCE

A second reached Cornelius Van Avery, at Phoenix, Arizona.

ABSOLUTELY OPPOSED TO ANY SUCH AN IDEA STOP QUIT PLAYING THE FOOL AND COME HOME

This message came from Pittsburgh and was signed: "Father."

A telegram was also sent by the secretary of the Cattlemen's Association of Arizona, addressed to Hashknife Hartley . . .

Elene Corey wired one word: "Coming." Cornelius Van Avery's answer to his father was:

AM NOT PLAYING THE FOOL STOP IT'S A GIFT

Hashknife Hartley did not answer his wire.

Sleepy Stevens, Hashknife's partner, was susceptible to beauty. Just now he was aware that the prettiest girl he had ever seen was sitting across the aisle from him. She was wearing a dark dress unrelieved by any other color. Her hair had a coppery sheen in the train lights, and there was a sober sadness in her big eyes. Sleepy wondered how she would look if she smiled.

Sleepy was undeniably a cowboy. A battered Stetson lay on his lap; his gray

trousers were tucked into the tops of well worn, high heeled boots. He was of average height, wide of shoulder and slightly bowlegged. His face was blocky and deeply graved, his mouth wide above a firm chin. His eyes were of a peculiar blue—innocent looking eyes which seemed to regard the world with surprise.

Seated beside Sleepy was Hashknife Hartley, half asleep. At least he appeared half asleep. Hashknife was several inches over six feet in height, lean and lank as a greyhound. His face was thin with prominent cheekbones, a generous nose and a wide, thin lipped mouth. His hair was a sandy roan color and badly in need of trimming. One damp lock habitually dropped down to intersect his right eyebrow. His garb was much the same as that of Sleepy.

On the opposite seat were their warbags—the valises of cowboys—in which they carried their worldly goods.

Outside was the moonlit panorama of the passing Arizona scenery. Sleepy nudged Hashknife, who opened his eyes quickly and glanced sidewise at him.

"Huh?" he grunted vacantly.

"She almost smiled," whispered Sleepy.

"Who?"

"Across the aisle," replied Sleepy. "Gosh, didja ever see one that was prettier?"

Hashknife sighed and shifted his position.

"I hope you fall in love some day," said Sleepy.

"No, you don't." Hashknife yawned and looked at his watch.

"I wish somethin' would happen to give me a chance to speak to her." Sleepy spoke his thought aloud.

The station whistle of the engine came drifting back to them, and in a few moments the train began to slacken speed. A brakeman, carrying a lantern, came through the car, going toward the front.

"What station is this?" asked Sleepy.

"Porcupine—a flag station. Don't stop here once a month," mumbled the brakeman as he hurried on.

Hashknife glanced at a folder which had been well thumbed.

"We've got ten miles more, Sleepy."

"Is that all?" Sleepy sighed, looking at the girl across the aisle.

Only ten miles more, and another pretty girl would pass out of his life. Sleepy's love affairs usually lasted just about that long.

The train drew to a clanking stop. Into the car stumbled a man carrying two heavy pieces of baggage. He wore his big five-gallon Stetson jerked down over one eye, and he was panting from exertion as he staggered aboard.

Crash! The lower half of a window splintered, and from the depot platform came the crack of a revolver.

The passenger from Porcupine sat down heavily in the aisle, with both valises on his lap, as the train pulled out. He cocked his head to one side and looked with fear at the broken window. The lights of the station faded out before he got to his feet.

HE WAS a young man, not much past his majority, and too fair of skin to belong in this country. His well shaped head was covered with damp blond curls. His clothes were an expensive mixture; well tailored, but the trousers were tucked into a pair of the gaudiest cowboy boots the two cowboys had ever seen. He stood up in them awkwardly and looked at the three people in the car.

"That shot didn't hit you, did it?" asked Hashknife.

"No, sir," said the young man seriously. "I think it hit my baggage. May I sit down?"

"You've got a ticket, haven't you?" Sleepy grinned.

"No, sir, I haven't. You see, I—I did not have time to purchase one."

"Jist flew and 'lighted, eh?" Sleepy was still grinning as the young man took the seat behind the lady.

"Yes, I imagine that was it. Sorry to arrive that way, but I—you see, I had no choice."

The brakeman came through, crunched some of the glass with his heel as he went down the aisle and stopped short to glance at the broken window.

"What busted the window?" he asked; then he added before any one might answer, "Wasn't that a shot fired in Porcupine?"

"Mebbe it was a drunken cowboy," suggested Hashknife.

"Yeah, I suppose it was. Darn fool might have hurt somebody."

The brakeman kicked the glass out of the aisle and went on. The young man leaned over the back of the seat, and the girl turned to look at him.

"I'm sorry if it frightened you," he said. "I really wasn't to blame."

"It was perfectly all right," replied the girl calmly, and Sleepy wanted to applaud her.

"You see, there was a poker game," explained the young man. "I was looking at some ranch property which did not suit me."

He took a deep breath and laughed softly.

"I really do not know one cow from another, and all land looks like just dirt to me. But the poker game—I really believe it was started to cheat me out of some money. You see, we each bought a thousand dollars' worth of chips. There were two cowboys and a saloon-keeper. He—the saloon-keeper —staked the two cowboys. I had two aces, clubs and spades, and I also had the king of clubs and two little clubs. Well, I was inclined to draw one card to the flush, but decided to draw to my two aces.

"I drew a pair of sevens, which made me two pair, and I bet all the chips I had. Well, one of the cowboys had three kings, and one of the kings was clubs. I searched the deck, but was unable to find more than one king of clubs."

He drew another deep breath and continued:

"I had heard that it is dangerous to accuse a cowboy of cheating; so I—I drew my gun and made them give me back my thousand dollars. Then I backed out, secured my baggage at the hotel, and I just did catch this train."

The girl looked across at Hashknife and Sleepy, who were gazing upon the young man with undisguised amazement.

"I think you did very well," she said dryly.

"Do you?" he asked eagerly. "That is certainly fine of you."

The conductor did not notice the broken window, but came straight to the young man.

"Ticket, please," he said gruffly.

"Ticket? Oh, yes. No, I haven't any ticket, but I have money," he said, drawing out a roll of bills.

"Red Hill is the next station," said the conductor. "Be there in five minutes now."

The girl stood up and began closing a valise.

"How far are you going?" asked the conductor of the young man.

"Oh, yes." The young man scratched his cheek thoughtfully. "Take out the fare from Porcupine to Red Hill, Conductor."

"All right. That will exactly empty this car."

The young man leaned over and spoke to Hashknife—

"Is that your destination too?"

"Seems to be." The tall cowboy smiled.

"Isn't that fine! Why, this is a regular party. I'm glad I came."

The girl stood up and reached for a suitcase on the rack above the window, but the young man sprang on his seat and lifted it down.

"May I assist you with this?" he asked seriously.

Hashknife reached across and took it from him. Before the young man could voice a protest, Hashknife said—

"You get off the rear of this train, young man; we'll handle all the baggage."

"But I don't see—"

"Mebbe you forget there's telegraph wires in this country. Drop off and keep out of sight for a few minutes."

The young man was not exactly a fool, and he grasped Hashknife's meaning. They were nearing Red Hill. Hashknife picked up the girl's valise and one belonging to the young man, who walked swiftly back through the coaches as the train slowed.

As they came to the doorway they saw a man running beside the train. He was there as they came down to the platform—a big, square headed man, with the lights from the train flashing on the sheriff's emblem on his vest. He glanced sharply at the girl and the two cowboys, decided that none of them answered the description, then sprang into the coach.

He was running through the train as

it started, and they saw him make a quick leap from the rear coach. His intentions were to land on the end of the high depot platform, but he miscalculated about six feet, and they saw him go end over end down the embankment and disappear in the darkness.

Hashknife chuckled and turned to the girl.

"Where are you goin'?" he asked.

"There is only one hotel here," she said.

"You've been here before?"

"My home is at Painted Wells."

"Yeah? Well, I reckon we might as well go to that hotel."

There was little illumination on the main street of Red Hill, but they had no trouble in finding the New York Hotel. And in the diminutive lobby they found the young man again, arguing with the whiskered proprietor about a room with bath.

"WELL, howdy, Miss Corey!" exclaimed the old man, holding out his hand. "By golly, it's shore good to see you. Thought you was in—oh, yeah, I done forgot about your pa."

The girl's eyes filled with tears, but she smiled gamely. The young man looked inquiringly at her.

"Well, now, I'll give you a front room, Miss Corey," said the proprietor nervously. "Reckon you're tired plumb out. You come with me, and the rest of you fellers'll have to wait."

He took the girl's baggage and went up the rickety stairs ahead of her. At the landing the girl turned.

"Thank you for carrying my bags," she said to Hashknife.

"You're shore welcome, Miss Corey."

"What a girl!" said the young man softly. He turned to Hashknife. "My name is Cornelius Van Avery," he said.

"Mine's Hartley." Hashknife smiled, and introduced Sleepy.

"You better git into a room pretty quick," advised Sleepy. "That sheriff done a high dive off that train, and I'm bettin' he ain't in no condition to see anythin' funny in the world."

"Thank you very much for helping me. I never thought they would telegraph. What do you suppose they told the sheriff?"

"That you held 'em up," replied Hashknife dryly. "You did, didn't you?"

"Well, I suppose I did—yes," he said, laughing. "And I lost my gun when I climbed into the train. I suppose I can buy another here."

"Why do you need a gun?"

"Well, it came in handy once."

"Shore. Next time your luck might change. I'd advise you to grow up to fit the country before you start packin' hardware."

"Thanks," dryly. "But you forget that the sheriff is after me."

Hashknife laughed and shook his head.

"Van Avery, if that sheriff ever recognizes you, hold up your hands. The law will give you an even break, but an Arizona sheriff don't take chances."

The old man came back and assigned their rooms.

"No bath?" queried Van Avery.

"Not unless you git in a waterin' trough, young feller. Hell, you don't look so awful dirty!"

"Don't folks around here take baths?"

"Well, I ain't never seen none of 'em in the act."

"I suppose I can stand it."

"What time does the stage leave for Painted Wells?" asked Hashknife.

"Nine o'clock sharp, if the driver's sober."

"Thanks."

"Are you going to Painted Wells?" asked Van Avery.

"Shore," drawled Sleepy.

"Miss Corey is goin' too," offered the old man. "Her pa was killed sev'ral days ago up there. She's been to Chicago, studyin' for to be somethin'—I dunno what."

"Call me at eight in the morning," said Van Avery, and they went clattering up the stairs to their rooms.

"What do you make of Cornelius?" Sleepy asked as the two cowboys undressed.

"He's good for a laugh," replied Hashknife, his eyes twinkling. "Can you imagine him pullin' a gun and takin' his money back? Stickin' up two punchers and a gambler! Sleepy, there must be somethin' that looks out for babies and fools. And the fact that the sheriff is

lookin' for him don't faze him a bit, 'cause he don't realize that they'd send him over the road for what he done tonight."

"Oh, shore." Sleepy laughed. "Fools draw guns, where gunmen set on their hands and keep still. That Miss Corey is shore pretty, and she belongs in Painted Wells. Now jist what in hell do you suppose they wanted us to go to Painted Wells for? No information—jist go there."

"Probably don't amount to much," replied Hashknife, yanking at a recalcitrant boot.

"Mysterious stuff!" snorted Sleepy. "They knowed you'd go. If they come right out and told you what it was all about, you'd prob'ly turn down the job. Anyway, I don't hanker for no Cattle Association work—not openly. Ain't worth the risk. Some day they'll be sayin':

" 'Oh, yeah, I remember them two fellers. They got snagged on a couple hot bullets. Too bad.'

"That's what they'll be sayin', and we'll be, as Adobe Ed calls 'em, a couple skillingtons. I asked Ed what a skillington was, and he said it was a man with his insides out and his outsides off."

Hashknife laughed as he took his belt and holstered gun from his warbag and hung them on the bedpost.

"We'll see about pickin' up a couple broncs in the mornin'," he said.

Sleepy frowned.

"And not go on the stage?"

Hashknife smiled.

"Not if we can get broncs."

"Pshaw!" said Sleepy, looking disconsolately at Hashknife.

"Thinkin' about ridin' with Miss Corey?"

"Allus somebody takin' the joy out of my life," complained Sleepy, as he crawled between the blankets. "I wonder if the sheriff will be watchin' for Cornelius?"

"No," replied Hashknife, "he thinks Cornelius is still on that train, unless he wired to the next town to pick him up, and I don't believe he'd do that. Prob'ly wire back to Porcupine and tell 'em there wasn't no such a person on that train. From the position he was in the last we saw, he likely rubbed his nose off on the cinders."

"How far is it to Painted Wells?" asked Sleepy.

"Hadn't ought to be more than fifteen, twenty miles, according to the local maps."

"Hope it's a hundred and fifty," said Sleepy.

"Why?"

Sleepy grinned.

"Be easier to take the stage than to ride a strange horse."

Hashknife blew out the light.

IN THE cold light of day, Red Hill was not a place of beauty. The main street was a sort of dog leg in shape; most of the false-fronted buildings were closed, the windows boarded. The drop in the market price of copper had made Red Hill what it was this day—almost a ghost town, just struggling along without any visible means of support.

Red Hill had once been a copper producer while Painted Wells, fifteen miles to the north, had been only a cow town until a big gold strike had been made. There were still plenty of cattle on the Painted Wells range, but gold was the big thing.

Across the street from the New York Hotel was the Elite Saloon, a big place which had flourished in the palmy days of Red Hill. At the bar stood Banty Brayton, the sheriff, and Handsome Hartwig, his deputy. The sheriff was a big man, grizzled, with a scraggly mustache adorning his serious face.

Handsome Hartwig was five feet six in height, broad of beam, with the champion bowlegs of the county. Handsome had a bullet shaped head, weary blue eyes, scarcely any eyebrows, a long, rubicund nose and a mouth which seemed to extend from ear to ear.

"No, I'll tell you what happened to him, Ezry," Handsome said to the bartender. "One of them squawk mouthed waddies down in Porcupine sent Banty a telegram las' night, sayin' that a feller had stuck up their poker game, took away plenty *dinero* and made a getaway on the train. Banty, bein' one of them there Arizony sheriffs what allus gits his man, hopped the train when it pulls in

and gallops the whole len'th of the train, askin' everybody if they was from Porcupine. They wasn't, and then—"

"Never no such a damn thing!" growled Banty. "What I done—"

"The train was pullin' out," continued Handsome, "and Banty runs to the rear end, where he thinks he sees this here bandit goin' down a gopher hole at the end of the platform; so Banty ups and does himself a dive after this here hole-huntin' jigger."

"No such a damn thing," corrected the sheriff wearily.

"Well, look at his face, if you don't believe me," said Handsome. "He ain't got no skin on his nose, one eyebrow's gone, and he'll shore have to use sheep dip on his chin, if he ever raises any whiskers agin."

"And you didn't git the holdup man, eh?" queried the bartender.

"Wasn't none," said Handsome disgustedly. "Can you imagine arrestin' a man for holdin' up a poker game in Porcupine? Mebbe he hijacked the gang, but that's all. Can you imagine that bunch gittin' up on a witness stand and swearin' that somebody robbed 'em?"

Banty gazed at his glass.

"Bein' a sheriff ain't such a nice job," offered the bartender.

"Nice!" Banty spat the word.

"I 'member how hard you worked to git elected," said Handsome. "You been sheriff less 'n a year, and you're sour on the job. I think she's a great job."

"You be damned! What do you know about it? All you've done is to make fun of everythin'. You're a hell of a deputy!"

"I'm all right."

"You ain't neither. Morally and physically you're a wreck. Financially, you ain't got nothin', and—"

"I'm all right physically."

"With them bowlegs and that nose? You look like a cross between a ant-eater and a pair of ice tongs."

"Gee!" exclaimed Handsome softly. "Well, I'm all right mentally, Banty."

"You're crazy."

"Well—" Handsome sighed resignedly —"my heart is in the right place."

"So's your gall."

The sheriff sighed deeply and looked through the window. The Painted Wells stage was loading at the little stage office. Elene Corey and Cornelius Van Avery were on the sidewalk watching Mark Hawker, the driver, arranging his load. Van Avery was wearing his big hat and high heeled boots. Handsome turned his head and looked.

"Ain't that Elene Corey?" he asked.

"I thought I seen her gittin' off the train last night," grunted the sheriff. "Go over and talk to her, Handsome."

"Talk to her yourself," retorted the deputy. "Allus sluffin' the dirty work off on me."

"Hawker's prob'ly told her," said the bartender.

"Who's that fancy jigger with her?" wondered Handsome. "Do you reckon she brought that specimen from the East, Banty?"

"Looks like it."

"That there Studson hat shore cost a hunk of *dinero*."

"Dressed in black," muttered the sheriff. "Prob'ly heard a'ready."

"Shore, she knows her pa is dead, 'cause her ma sent her a telegram."

"Uh-huh. Betcha she don't know her brother-in-law is in jail for murder."

"You ought to go over and tell her, Banty. You was the one what made the arrest."

They moved over closer to the window and saw Elene and Van Avery climb up on the stage.

"Mebbe she got married," said Handsome.

"Hope so," said the sheriff. "Prob'ly help you keep your mind on my business. You're bad enough normally, but if you ever fell in love I'd hate to see you—at your age."

"I'm a young man yet."

"Young! Why, you've got one foot in the grave and the other on a cake of soft soap. Let's have a drink."

CORNELIUS VAN AVERY looked over Red Hill as they rode out of town.

"Quite a place," he observed to Elene.

They were on the wide seat with Mark Hawker, who was viciously chewing tobacco and trying to keep his mind on the horses. He spat violently.

"Best danged town in Arizony!" he

snorted.

"What is the population?" asked Van Avery

"Thirty-five souls, six Chinamen and about sixty Mexicans. Are you goin' to Painted Wells on business or pleasure?"

"Is it a good town?" asked Van Avery, ignoring the question.

"Best in Arizony. Ask Miss Corey; she was raised there. Her pa was killed there a few days ago. Pretty danged hot weather to keep a corpse, too."

Van Avery shifted his eyes and looked at Elene. Her eyes were full of tears, but she shook her head at Van Avery, indicating that Hawker's remark was merely from ignorance and with no intent to hurt her feelings.

"Too bad about Ken Steele, wasn't it?" remarked Hawker.

"What about Ken?" asked Elene quickly.

"They've got him jailed for killin' your pa."

"They've—you say Ken killed my father, Mark?"

"Yeah."

"But—oh, that couldn't be! My God! Oh, poor Glad!"

Van Avery steadied her with a hand on her shoulder. He thought she was going to faint. They traveled along in silence for a long time. Elene was looking straight ahead with her hands clenched in her lap, trying to steady her nerves. Finally she turned to Van Avery.

"Ken Steele is my sister's husband," she said. "His father disowned him when he married my sister."

"Was that so terrible?" asked Van Avery.

"His father is wealthy," said Elene, "and Ken owed lots of money. Glad wrote to me very often. Ken couldn't pay his debts on what he could make as a cowboy. He worked for my father. But he and Glad were very much in love."

Hawker spat again.

"My the'ry is, too danged much Ed Ault," he said.

Elene looked at the driver quickly.

"What do you mean?"

"What everybody knows, if they know anythin' a-tall. Ed Ault has been stuck on your sister for more 'n a year. He hated Ken Steele, 'cause Ken won her. Old Silver Steele refused to pay Ken's gamblin' debts, contendin' that Ken was of age, and Ault shore shut down on Ken real hard. Ken has that little home in town and he's got a few head of horses. Ault had the sheriff collect everythin' Ken owned."

"But why blame Ed Ault? If Ken owed—"

"Well, he pushed Ken awful hard for money. He didn't collect everythin' Ken owned until after the murder. You see, your dad had a ten thousand dollar mortgage on his place with the bank. They refused to keep it a-runnin' any longer, and your dad was stuck for money. Him and Ault has been friends a long time, and Ault loaned him the money to pay the bank, him a-takin' a note for a year.

"It happened about four o'clock in the afternoon, after the bank had done closed up, and your pa started home with the money. Ken was in the saloon and heard Ault and your pa talkin'; so he started out ahead of your pa. Now, I ain't a-sayin' who done it. Your pa had been hit over the head, prob'ly after he was shot; and the sheriff found Ken's gun in the brush near the spot. It had blood on it, and one shell had been spent."

"And the money gone?" asked Elene huskily.

"Oh, shore. Ken shut his mouth tight, after he denied doin' the job; and they can't git nothin' out of him."

The road was rather dangerous; so the driver ceased his discourse to handle the team. Finally he turned to Van Avery.

"Are you a drummer?" he asked.

"A drummer?" Van Avery laughed. "No, I am no musician."

"Hell!" snorted Hawker softly.

"Sorry," said Van Avery. "But I suppose I could beat a drum."

"Are you jist smart or ignorant?" asked Hawker.

Van Avery flushed quickly.

"I don't believe my mental status is any of your business."

"Your mental what?"

Van Avery shrugged his shoulders. Hawker glanced at Elene.

"This feller come from the East with you?" he asked.

"No one came from the East with me," she replied evenly.

He turned to Van Avery.

"Kinda new in this country, ain'tcha?"

"You are considered a good driver, are you not?" countered Van Avery.

"I shore am."

"Well, stop your cross-examination and confine yourself to driving."

HAWKER scratched the back of his neck, spat copiously and studied the road ahead, where it led through the sandy bed of a dry wash. The heavy stage lurched along through the ruts and up the bank, where it ran through a grove of giant saguaro cactus and a heavy growth of ocotillo. As they swung around a curve, the lead horses swerved wildly from the road, yanking the heavy wheels out of the ruts and causing the driver to jerk frantically on the lines.

All was confusion for a moment. Van Avery was nearly thrown from the seat. They recovered only to see two masked men, guns in hand, one at the head of a lead horse, the other near the right front wheel of the stage. Hawker's hands were high above his head, and the other two lost no time in emulating his example.

"You can take down your hands," said the man near the wheel, "and throw down the money box." His gun shifted quickly to Van Avery. "Keep your hands up, *hombre!* I'm speakin' to the driver."

"She's empty today," replied Hawker dryly.

The bandit's gun swung back to cover Hawker.

"Throw it down."

Hawker immediately tossed down the money box.

"Get down—all of you!" ordered the leader of the two bandits.

They lost no time in obeying orders. The other bandit came toward them.

"Search 'em," said the spokesman huskily. "Never mind the lady."

Van Avery shifted his feet, with no intention of interfering with the robbery, but as quick as a flash the spokesman fired. Van Avery cried out sharply as he jerked back, seemed to catch his heel, and fell backward, striking his head on the hub of the wheel. Then he was down, his body motionless.

"Damn fool to reach for a gun," growled the killer.

"He hasn't any gun," said Elene. "You never gave him a chance, you murdering brute."

The killer laughed harshly.

"You talk like a native, ma'am."

"Want me to go through him?" asked the other bandit. "Better make it fast."

"Let him go. You two pile on to that stage and head out of here."

"Won't you put him on the stage?" asked Elene.

"To hell with him. Git up there and git out. Driver, you hit the grit and don't look back."

"How about that money box—it's empty."

"Leave it here. We'll judge that end of it. Now, travel!"

Hawker was no fool. He lashed the team, and the stage went rocking on toward Painted Wells. Elene glanced back as they struck the next curve in the road; but the two bandits had gone and Van Avery was still there.

"Stop the team, will you?" she asked Hawker.

"What for?" he asked, making no effort to comply with her wishes.

"Let me off, and please give me your gun."

Hawker looked narrowly at her.

"Don't be a fool. The sheriff and deputy was in Red Hill when we left, and they'll find him."

"It may be hours before they come along."

"It'll be all the same to that tenderfoot. He never knew what hit him. Who was he, anyway?"

"What difference does that make? At least, he is a gentleman."

"Mebbe he *was*. Don't be so danged upset. He wasn't anythin' to you, was he?"

"They shot him down for no reason at all."

"Thought he was tryin' to draw a gun."

"I tell you he had no gun."

"Well, it's none of my business. I'm paid to drive a stage, not to swap lead with holdup men. There wasn't no money in that box."

THE dust of the disappearing stage had hardly settled, when Van Avery opened his eyes and blinked up at the top of a saguaro. He was conscious of a dull ache in his head and a great thirst. The bright sun, slanting down past the saguaro top, hurt his eyes.

With no clear understanding of anything, he sat up, winked rapidly, swallowed thickly and wondered what sort of dream this might be. He was sitting in the middle of a dusty road; that much was certain. There seemed to be a number of those queer looking, tall cacti surrounding him. He rubbed his head and began collecting his thoughts. His left side interested him and, after feeling around, he discovered that his fingers were sticky with blood.

And then his memory came back like a shot. He remembered everything now. There had been two masked men. Now they were gone, and the stage was gone.

There was a stinging sensation in his side, but his head hurt even worse. It was bleeding a little, and there was a lump the size of an egg just above his right ear.

His big Stetson hat was still on the ground where it had fallen. He finally got to his feet, fought back the dizziness, put on his hat and tilted it down over his left ear. His sense of direction was faulty, but he reasoned that either direction would take him to a town; so he started bravely toward Painted Wells. He was weakly staggering when Banty Brayton and Handsome Hartwig overtook him.

They recognized him as the young man who had climbed aboard the stage at Red Hill, but they asked no questions. Handsome always carried a small canteen of water on his saddle, and he also had a bottle of something stronger in his chaps pocket. He gave Van Avery a generous drink of both and set him down in the shade.

"This jigger has shore been bumped," declared Handsome.

"Blood there on his shirt," said Banty. "Mebbe been shot."

"Been shot?" queried Handsome.

"I—I think so," whispered Van Avery. "More water, please."

"Shore; wet the old neck and then lemme see that side."

Examination proved that Van Avery had been shot. The bullet had furrowed the flesh and skidded off a rib, but had done little real damage. The shock had knocked him down, and his head hitting the hub of the wheel had caused the shooter to consider the shot a bull's-eye.

"How do you feel?" asked the sheriff.

"Fine," lied Van Avery. "Where's the stage?"

"What happened to you, anyway?"

"Two masked men held us up."

"Lovely dove!" exclaimed Handsome. "One of 'em shoot you?"

"I suppose that is what occurred."

"Why did he shoot you?"

"I haven't the slightest idea."

The sheriff snorted disgustedly and turned to the horses.

"Double up with him on your horse, Handsome." And to Van Avery, "You ride a horse, don'tcha?"

"If they are gentle."

"Oh, yeah. Well, git into that saddle of mine, and I'll ride behind you. My bronc won't buck much—not with my weight on his rump."

Van Avery tried to mount on the right side of the horse; but Handsome led him around and helped him into the saddle. The horse made a strenuous objection to the sheriff; but the big man, handling the reins from the rear, spurred the animal into the road and let it run a few hundred yards with the double burden, after which it was willing to adopt a slower gait.

"Feelin' all right, kid?" asked the sheriff.

"My name is Cornelius Van Avery."

"I reckon that'll hold you for awhile." Handsome laughed.

The sheriff squinted thoughtfully as he considered the back of Van Avery's head.

"Did you come from Porcupine last night?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," replied Van Avery.

"You did, eh? I hear you stuck up a poker game down there."

"Did you hear about that too? I discarded a king of clubs, and one of them stole it. I—I made them give me back my money, and then I—I—"

"Oh, oh!" yelled Handsome "Grab him, Banty! Why, the son of a gun fainted. That's it, hold him up straight.

Let him lean agin you. He's lost quite a lot of blood, I'll betcha. Can you handle him all right?"

"Shore, he can't fall."

"Well, I'll be a horned toad! So that's the jigger that held up them thieves in Porcupine! Stole his discards, eh? Yeah, that sounds like gospel truth to me. And you ain't goin' to arrest him for it either, Banty."

"Who said I was? Keep still about him bein' the feller. He ain't got no more business bein' in Arizona than I have bein' President."

"You ought to adopt him, Banty. Give you somethin' to do. Take him at that tender age, and you might even train him to catch rustlers, holdup men and higraders. I'd take a chance, if I was you. But git him a name. Don't let him grow up answerin' to the name of Cornelius. Imagine a couple parents hamstringin' a kid thataway.

"Cor-neil-yus! Sounds like a bullet glancin' off a rock, if you say it real quick. Might call him Corny. But him bein' sort of a sorrel, we might call him Blondy. Yeah, I'd vote for Blondy. You better hold him up straighter. You wouldn't want the poor critter to git a perm'nent kink in his neck and have to spend the rest of his life lookin' at them boots of his'n, would you?"

"Them are purty boots," said Banty.

"Yeah, they are. Betcha they cost fifty dollars. Him a-wearin' fifty-dollar boots and a million-dollar hat, tryin' to mount a bronc from the wrong side! I hope he don't die on your hands, Banty. Looks to me as though he was leakin' a lot of blood."

"Aw, he's all right. Old Doc Smedley will fix him up fine."

"Yeah, I betcha he will. Prob'ly probe him len'thwise for that bullet, which ain't in him. That's how Old Smed learned anatomy. If you go to him with a cut finger, the first thing he does is examine you for stringhalt and ringbone. Yeah, he may fix Blondy up all right, but by the time he's through with the treatment, poor Blondy will nicker instead of laugh. I 'member the time old Smed treated me for indigestion. Three days later a paper blowed across the room, and I kicked the door off the hinges. Don't tell me he wasn't a horse doctor before he came to Painted Wells."

"May I have a drink of water?" asked Van Avery hoarsely.

"Whisky or water?" asked Handsome.

"Water, please."

"Doc's got a job on his hands," said Handsome seriously.

HASHKNIFE and Sleepy had shipped their saddles, bridles and chaps to Red Hill, and they had little difficulty in securing a pair of horses from a trader. Hashknife spent an hour with the proprietor of the hotel, trying to get some information about Painted Wells; something which would account for the Cattle Association's sending him and Sleepy there on a blind trail.

"Feller named Steele—Old Silver, they calls him—owns most of the biggest mine up there," offered the hotel man. "Calls it Comanche Chief. Free millin' gold mine, and a good producer. Steele also owns the JS cow outfit. That there girl who went out on the stage was born up there at Painted Wells. Daddy's name was Milt Corey, and a nicer feller you never did see. But a few days ago his son-in-law gunned him to death, they say. They got Ken Steele in jail, and they say it looks bad agin him."

"Is this Ken Steele a son of Silver Steele?" asked Hashknife.

"Shore is. Ain't never been no friendship between Milt Corey and Silver Steele. But Corey's daughter runs away and marries Steele's son, and it made Steele so damn mad that he throwed the kid out. Then the kid went to work for Corey, punchin' cows; and I thought everythin' was all right. They tell me that old Milt had ten thousand dollars on him when he was killed, and the money was gone when they found him."

All of which was not enlightening to Hashknife because, checking up on dates, he found that Corey's death occurred late in the afternoon of the same day he had received the telegram in the morning. There was no hint of any cattle rustling or horse stealing. The old hotel man would have known if there had been, because he seemed to know everything else.

"I reckon we'll jist have to go to

Painted Wells and stay there long enough to find out what is wrong," said Hashknife. "It's a cinch we're not there to investigate this Corey murder; and that's about all the old man knows anythin' about."

"Anyway—" Sleepy smiled—"the road runs north, and there's hills to cross."

"And a pretty girl in Painted Wells," added Hashknife.

"And then some more hills," said Sleepy seriously. "Me and you always a-driftin', and more hills ahead."

Hashknife looked wistfully at his partner.

"We're a queer pair, Sleepy. We're like the bear in that old song, who went over the mountain to see what he could see. And we've seen a lot of things, us two."

"And nothin' to show for it," said Sleepy.

"I dunno," remarked Hashknife thoughtfully. "Who has more? What would we do with money? Suppose you had a million, Sleepy."

"Oh, I could git along on half that much. Have a couple of new heels put on my boots, a new cinch on my saddle, and I'd shore buy you a new vest, Hashknife."

"Make damn dudes out of both of us, eh? That's what money does to you. No, we're better off thisaway."

Perhaps the pretty girl was some inducement to Sleepy, but it was the lure of a strange place—the other side of the hill—that beckoned these two cowboys on. Always the hills called to them; and always there were more hills beyond these hills, and the call was ever the same.

Henry—Hashknife—Hartley, son of an itinerant minister of the Gospel, began life in the Milk River country of Montana. He was a cowpoke at ten and a top hand at sixteen. The wage of a range sky-pilot is small; and the long, gangling, gray eyed kid was obliged to make his own way.

Even at that age the hills called, and he drifted across Montana, Idaho, Washington and the cattle ranges of Oregon. There were hills to the south, and he wandered to the land of manzanita, down through the painted country. Ten years of wandering brought him to the old Hashknife outfit, where he met Dave—Sleepy—Stevens, another cowboy with an itching foot, who had wandered from the south of Idaho.

And here was formed the partnership which Sleepy designated as the "Cowpunchers of Disaster." Together they rode away to see what might be on the other side of the hill. No place claimed them for long. Winter or Summer, they kept heading for the hills, wondering what fate had in store for them on the other side.

Back of Hashknife's level gray eyes was the brain of a detective—the ability to piece out a dim trail where others had failed. As Sleepy had said, "Give him a dog track and he'll find a elephant."

Working for the law had no appeal for them. They were not manhunters. At rare times they would do a bit of detective work for a cattle association; but it irked them to accept such an assignment. They wanted to be free. And the secretary of this particular association knew this. That was why he merely asked them to go to Painted Wells. It left an element of mystery, which he knew would interest Hashknife.

Sleepy never stopped to analyze anything. He had a blind faith in Hashknife's ability, a ready gun and the nerve of a fatalist. Many a time fate had choked them with powder fumes and hot bullets had sung a death song past their ears; but the same fate had left them unscathed. Death had struck at them from beside trails, lashed out at them in the dark; but they kept riding on, like the cowboy of that old range song:

Oh, I'll eat when I'm hungry,
I'll drink when I'm dry;
If a horse don't fall on me,
I'll live till I die.

CHAPTER II

THE TENDERFOOT

HANDSOME HARTWIG, tilted back at the sheriff's desk, his feet on its top, gazed complacently at Silver Steele.

The big rancher and mine owner sat slumped in an armchair, his sombrero

on the floor beside him. Steele was square jawed, with a face like hewn granite, and a huge mane of silver-white hair. He wore tailored suits, which were never pressed after they left the tailor. His trousers were tucked into the tops of his boots. He invariably held the stump of a half smoked cigar in one corner of his mouth.

"No, I didn't want to see Ken," he said gruffly.

"All right." Handsome nodded.

Steele scowled at the floor for several moments. Then, looking quizzically at Handsome, he said—

"Just how much evidence have they got against him?"

"Two times two makes four," replied Handsome.

Steele grunted audibly and shifted his feet.

"Ken won't talk, eh?"

Handsome yawned.

"I reckon he ain't got nothin' to say."

Ensued a period of silence, broken by Steele.

"What do you make of that holdup and the shootin' of the tenderfoot?"

"That was kinda funny, Steele. Doc Smedley's still patchin' up that feller. Another queer thing—that feller swears somebody stole two thousand dollars off him while he was knocked out."

"Two thousand? That's a lot of money, Handsome."

"I'd think so, if it was mine. He says his name's Cornelius Van Avery. Can you imagine a man makin' a confession like that? I can't."

The sheriff came in, nodded shortly to Steele and sat down.

"We were discussin' Van Avery," said Handsome.

The sheriff snorted and reached for his pipe.

"Ain't you goin' to try and catch the men who held up the stage and shot him?" asked Steele.

"Catch 'em!" grunted the sheriff. "How'd you catch 'em? They've got the whole State of Arizona to git away in, ain't they? And if that ain't big enough, they can find another State, or head south to Mexico. You ain't been readin' detective stories, have you, Silver?"

"I'd like to see some action," said Steele impatiently. He moved his chair over close to the desk and lowered his voice.

"I'm puttin' my cards on the table," he said evenly. "Do you remember Jack Cherry?"

"You mean the drunken prospector who fell into a prospect hole and broke his neck?" asked the sheriff.

"He wasn't a prospector and he wasn't drunk, Banty. His name was Jack Payzant, and he was a detective. He never drank."

The two officers looked queerly at each other. They remembered the incident very well. In fact, they had taken the dead man out of the prospect hole a week after he had died; so there was no reason for either of them to forget him.

"There was a bottle half full of whisky," said Handsome.

Steele nodded grimly.

"They made it look good. I hired Payzant to find out who was higradin' my ore, and I think he found out. But he never had a chance to tell me."

"Your own miners must be stealin' the stuff," said the sheriff.

"How do they get rid of it? How does it get out of the country? Who extracts the gold? Payzant probably worked on that angle. I tell you, I'm losing a lot of money every month. Who the devil can I trust? I've got men on every shift, watchin' everybody. How do I know my spies are honest? I don't; I'm takin' a chance."

"If it was horse stealin' or cattle rustlin'—" began the sheriff.

"Hell!" raged Steele. "One man can carry the price of several cows in his overall pocket and not show much of a bulge. Right now I'm workin' jewelry ore; but if this keeps up, I'll close the Comanche Chief. Now, what do you know about this feller who calls himself Van Avery?"

"What would we know about him?" countered Handsome.

"You probably wouldn't know anythin'. I got in touch with the Cattle Association, and asked them to recommend an investigator. Here is the answer."

Steele handed the sheriff a telegram which he had just received.

It was signed "James," and its message was brief:

GOOD LUCK

"I think he means that he is sendin' or has sent the man he had in mind," said Steele. "Now, do you know anythin' about Van Avery?"

"Not a damn thing," admitted the sheriff.

"Why was he shot this mornin'?"

"Reached for a gun," said the sheriff. "That's what Hawker said."

"Miss Corey said he didn't have no gun," added Handsome. "And she said he never even reached for a gun. All he done was move his feet."

"Wait a minute, Steele," said the sheriff. "Lemme git this straight. You think this Van Avery is a detective and that the higraders knew he was comin' and tried to murder him?"

"How does it look to you?"

Handsome chuckled softly.

"If he is, they didn't need to murder him. That jigger couldn't find his hat on a dancehall floor."

"Mebbe he wants to act thataway," mused the sheriff.

"Yeah," drawled Handsome. "That's prob'ly why he ditched you at Red Hill last night."

"What was that?" asked Steele.

"Didn't you notice Banty's skinned nose and chin? He done a high dive off a movin' train last night."

THE sheriff hastened to tell Steele about what really had happened, because Handsome's narrative might give a wrong impression.

"How did you happen to git that telegram?" queried Steele.

"It was sent to Harry Wall, the constable at Red Hill; but Harry wasn't in town and they gave it to me, bein' as I happened to be at the depot when the telegram came."

"That ort to kinda prove that Van Avery ain't no detective," said Handsome.

"Why not?" countered Steele. "No pale faced tenderfoot could ever stick up a Porcupine poker game and git away with it."

"Not without a hell of a lot of luck." Handsome laughed. "Anyway, if this feller is a detective, he's shore disguised plenty."

"Do you want to see Ken?" asked the sheriff.

Steele shook his head and got to his feet as another man came strolling in.

This man was tall and gaunt, with a huge, bony face, deepset eyes and black hair. He was Rick Nelson, hardware merchant and proprietor of Nelson's Assay Office. Rick Nelson and Silver Steele had been friends for years. Milt Corey had hated both of them. At one time Corey had owned what was now the Comanche Chief mine. In fact, he had been the original discoverer; but adverse assay reports—reports made by Rick Nelson—had caused Corey to abandon the property which, relocated by Silver Steele, subsequently became a rich producer.

If such had been the case, no one could point to the fact that Rick Nelson had ever profited by any such duplicity. However, it caused Milt Corey to make public statements as to the crooked methods of both Steele and Nelson, who ignored the statements; but it ended their friendship with Corey.

Corey was dead now, and Steele's son in jail facing a murder charge. Nelson was not wealthy by any means; but his little hardware store supplied the surrounding country, and he did a good business in his assaying, which he handled personally. A man named Dave Bush conducted the hardware business for him.

"Anything new on the holdup?" asked Nelson.

"Not yet," said the sheriff. "It wasn't much of a holdup. There wasn't anythin' in the money box, Rick."

"That's what I heard. How's the feller who got shot?"

"He'll live, unless Doc Smedley experiments too much," replied Handsome.

"I don't like this holdup business," said Nelson. "Even if they didn't get anything this time, they might the next. That tenderfoot was mighty lucky he didn't get killed. Makes it kinda ticklish business for you to ship anything, don't it, Silver?"

"It would look thataway," replied Steele grimly. "But if I don't put a

crimp in this higradin' deal I won't have anythin' to ship."

"Why don't you hire a good detective?" asked Nelson.

"I suppose I'll have to do that, Rick. Can you recommend any?"

Nelson laughed huskily.

"No, I can't, Silver. Does anybody know when Corey is to be buried?"

"Prob'ly tomorrow," answered the sheriff. "Elene came home today."

The assayer nodded.

"You goin'?" asked Handsome.

"Certainly. Corey had a damn poor opinion of me, but every man is entitled to his own opinions. You're goin', ain't you, Silver?"

"I'm no damn hypocrite!" snapped Steele. "Of course, I'm not goin'. With my son in jail for murderin' him, I'd look damn well at that funeral, wouldn't I?"

Nelson flushed beneath his leathery tan.

"Well, you said you'd disown him, if he—" began Nelson.

"What if I did?" Silver Steele got to his feet. "A man might say anythin' when he's sore. You never had a son, Rick, so you don't know a damn thing about it. You can turn 'em down in fair weather, but if they're up against it, like my boy is—"

"Do you want to talk with him, Silver?" asked the sheriff softly.

"No, damn it, I don't! At least, not now."

Silver Steele stepped outside and went up the street.

Rick Nelson laughed scornfully.

"After all his talkin'."

"Well," said the sheriff slowly, "I think a damn sight more of Silver Steele than I ever did. I thought he was all guts and no heart."

ABOUT fifteen minutes later Hashknife and Sleepy stabled their horses. The sheriff met them as they were on their way to the hotel, and he recognized them as the two men who had been with Elene Corey when she got off the train at Red Hill.

It struck him that they might know something about Van Avery, so he stopped them. Hashknife recognized him and smiled broadly.

"Didja ever get the man you was divin' after?" he asked.

"I wasn't divin' after him," said the sheriff, grinning. "That's my way of gettin' off trains."

"Not very pretty, but it gits you all off," remarked Sleepy.

"Got me all off. Jist git in from Red Hill?"

Hashknife nodded.

"Speakin' of that young man," said the sheriff, "he was shot on the way up here."

"Shot?" queried Hashknife blankly.

"You happen to know anythin' about him?" asked the sheriff, after telling about the robbed stage and the shooting.

"He got on at Porcupine last night, and somebody shot at him through the coach window," said Hashknife. "He told us about how he stuck up a poker game and got his money back. I had a hunch them fellers might have wired ahead to stop him; so I told him to drop off the rear of the train at Red Hill."

"That's how I missed him," mused the sheriff. "Well, it's all right. So that's all you know about him, eh?"

"Jist that much. What was the idea of them holdup men shootin' him down thataway?"

"*Quien sabe?*" The sheriff shrugged his shoulders. "The girl said he didn't have any gun."

"Lost it in his hurry to get on that train last night," said Sleepy. "We advised him not to get another."

"Good advice," said the sheriff. "You boys goin' to stay here awhile?"

"A few days, I reckon," replied Hashknife. "We're kinda lookin' over the country, tryin' to locate some good range land."

"To buy?"

"No, I don't reckon we want to buy. Some of the bigger packing houses are leasin' range, you know. They buy yearlin's in Mexico—buy 'em cheap—and throw 'em on leased ranges."

"Yeah, I know they do."

"How are things goin' around here?" asked Hashknife. "Anythin' excitin' goin' on?"

"Not much," admitted the sheriff. "Pretty quiet country. Drop down to the office any time. We don't do much, but we talk plenty."

IT SEEMED as if everybody in the county came to Milt Corey's funeral. Hashknife and Sleepy saw Elene's sister, Mrs. Kenneth Steele, and her mother, a little wisp of a white haired woman with pain racked eyes. Mrs. Steele was younger than Elene, and she seemed to look defiantly at every one.

Ed Ault, the gambler-proprietor of the Yucca Saloon and Gambling House, was there. He was tall, immaculate, with his small black mustache sharply outlined against his pale skin.

"Looks like a danged buzzard," whispered Sleepy.

"Who?" queried Hashknife.

"That feller, Nelson, the assayer."

Rick Nelson was not unlike a huge buzzard, standing there at the edge of the grave, dressed in a rusty black Prince Albert with a small black hat perched on his long head and his hands clasped behind him.

"And there's Young-Man-Proud-of-His-Name," whispered Sleepy.

It was Cornelius Van Avery, looking rather pale, a bandage around his head. Many glances were turned his way, but he did not seem to notice anybody except Elene Corey. Hashknife noticed that Ault was rather interested in Van Avery.

After the funeral was over, the Corey family rode away in their buggy at once. Van Avery joined Hashknife and Sleepy.

"You've been kinda cuttin' up since we seen you last," said Hashknife.

Van Avery laughed nervously.

"But I did not do a thing. That man with the cloth over his face said something to me, and the next thing I knew I was there alone in the road."

"Did they really take two thousand dollars from your pocket?" asked Sleepy, who was a bit skeptical about the robbery.

"Yes, they did; but they overlooked five hundred dollars."

"Kinda looks as though your Pocupine friends cut in and took back their winnin's," observed Sleepy.

"That is worth considering," agreed Van Avery. "But how would they know I got off at Red Hill, and how would they know I was on that stage?"

"It's only about ten miles," replied Hashknife. "They might have ridden over, found you was at the hotel, watched you git on the stage and then cut in ahead of you—unless you can figure out a better reason for somebody shootin' you down thataway."

"I really can't," admitted Van Avery.

"Are you goin' over there and make 'em give it back?" asked Sleepy.

"I'm not exactly sure just what to do. There really should be an example made of men who shoot other men, don't you think?"

Hashknife inhaled deeply on his cigaret and looked keenly at Van Avery.

"Jist what is your business, Van Avery?" he asked.

"Why, I really haven't any business," replied the young man frankly. "You see, my father wanted me to stay in Pittsburgh after I tried to finish college. Oh, I did try hard. They even sent me to Stanford, over on the Pacific Coast. I tried real hard, but I—I did not seem to grasp things as I should. Then my mother died."

A note of sadness crept into his voice, and he looked away for a moment.

"Mother was fine. Not that dad isn't great, too, but he doesn't understand a fellow. Mother left me some money. Not a great deal, but—well, enough—and I wanted to do things, you see. I wanted to get away from the city. And—" Van Avery smiled broadly and spread his hands—"here I am."

"Yeah, here you are," agreed Hashknife. "Pardner, you need a keeper."

"Why?"

"Well, you've lost two thousand dollars already."

"Lost it twice," corrected Van Avery. "Do you believe in third times?"

"Not with that money." Hashknife grinned. "You'll never see that money again."

"Will you tell your dad about it?" asked Sleepy.

"I should say not! Why, if dad knew I had been shot and robbed he would have a fit. He has always lived in the city. You really have to live down here in Arizona to appreciate getting shot, don't you think?"

Hashknife choked over some tobacco smoke.

"Gittin' shot down here don't mean

nothin'," said Sleepy.

"I know it. Dr. Smedley seemed rather disappointed over my wound. I thought it was bad enough; but he said it wasn't hardly worth wasting thread on. I wonder where I can buy me another gun."

"At the hardware store," replied Hashknife.

"Thank you; I shall get one today."

"Figgerin' on gunnin' somebody?" asked Hashknife curiously.

"No one in particular; I merely thought I should like to have one." And Van Avery went on toward Rick Nelson's store.

"Can you imagine a jigger like that?" asked Sleepy.

HASHKNIFE snapped his cigaret into the dusty street as they walked toward the sheriff's office. Handsome was in the doorway and grinned a welcome. He had seen them talking with Van Avery and he wondered what their opinion of Van Avery might be.

"If he lives long enough he may learn somethin'," said Hashknife.

"He'd have to live a long time then," retorted Sleepy.

Handsome sprawled in his chair.

"That's my idea, too," he said, "but somebody else thinks different."

"That so?" queried Hashknife. "Some fortune teller?"

"Some fortune loser," laughed Handsome. "You see, Silver Steele, who owns the Comanche Chief mine, claims that higraders have been hookin' him out of a lot of money. Quite awhile ago there was a prospector here named Jack Cherry. He was around here quite a spell, and all to once he's found at the bottom of a twelve-foot prospect hole, deader 'n hell, along with half a quart of whisky.

"We jist found out that his right name was Payzant, and he was a detective hired by Steele; and Steele says he never drank. Steele says he got in touch with the Cattlemen's Association and asked them to send him the best man they knowed anythin' about. He's got a telegram which jist says, 'Good luck,' which he figgers means they've got the right man for the job. And Steele thinks this here rib-shot tenderfoot is that detective."

"Well, sir, he might be!" exclaimed Hashknife seriously. "You know, them detectives do queer things, Handsome."

Sleepy coughed and went to the door to get a breath of air. He had tears in his eyes as he turned to come back. But at that moment they heard what seemed to be the muffled report of a gun. As Hashknife and Handsome got to their feet they heard four more shots in rapid succession.

The three men ran out to the sidewalk, just in time to see Cornelius Van Avery back out of the hardware store doorway. He stopped in the middle of the sidewalk as if undecided, saw the three men in front of the office and came down toward them.

As he started, Dave Bush, who ran the store for Nelson, sprang out to the middle of the sidewalk and yelled at Van Avery—

"You come back here, you damn fool!"

Van Avery stopped and looked back. He dusted the palms of his hands on his hips and shook his head.

"I certainly shall not," he said firmly.

Rick Nelson came from his office and talked with Bush, who was gesticulating wildly, but speaking in a normal tone. Van Avery came to the front of the sheriff's office, his expression very serious. He looked back at Nelson and Bush.

"Why should I go back?" asked Van Avery. "Am I to blame in any way?"

"Who was doin' all that shootin'?" asked Handsome.

"I was," replied Van Avery casually.

"You was? What in hell was you shootin' at?"

"Nothing in particular."

"You didn't hit anybody, didja?" asked Sleepy.

Van Avery shook his head, keeping an eye on Bush and Nelson, who were coming toward him. Several others, who had heard the shooting, were also on their way to find out what had happened.

Dave Bush was an anemic looking man of about forty, bony of face, and with a very prominent pair of ears.

"Well, what happened, anyway?" growled Handsome.

"This feller," said Bush, pointing at Van Avery, "shot up the store. I tell you, he didn't miss my ear an inch!"

"Would be kinda hard to miss," said Handsome dryly as he turned to Van Avery. "Why didja shoot up the store?"

"That gun would not stop going off," replied Van Avery.

"Well, you poor fool!" snapped Bush. "I told you—"

"You tell it, young man," interrupted Handsome. "Mr. Bush is kinda excited over almost losin' a ear."

Van Avery took a deep breath and smiled weakly.

"Well, it was like this: I went in there to purchase a gun. This man said he had the sort of gun I needed, and he showed me a gun. I took the gun, but it was rather strange; so I—"

"What kind of a gun was it, Bush?" asked the deputy.

"A Colt .45 automatic," growled Bush.

"I know the gun," grunted Handsome. "You couldn't sell it to a man, so you tried to shove it off on this—" pointing at Van Avery.

"It's a damn good gun," insisted Bush.

"There is something wrong with it," said Van Avery.

"You don't know anything about a gun, that's your trouble."

"Well, what's to be done about it?" asked Handsome. "Nobody hurt. You can't expect the young man to buy it, can you?"

"No, I don't," grunted Bush. "He hadn't ought to have a gun—he's dangerous."

"I'm not dangerous," retorted Van Avery, "but that gun you loaded for me is certainly dangerous. It wouldn't stop shooting."

"I found that out," replied Bush. "But you didn't need to throw it through that back window."

"The window," said Van Avery, "was merely incidental; I just threw it, and the window happened to be there."

Nelson laughed at Van Avery's explanation, then turned to Bush.

"If the young man feels the need of a gun, sell him a good one. But take my advice and send that automatic to a gunsmith."

"All right," replied Bush ungraciously. "But if I sell him a gun, he'll have to load it outside the store. I'm all jumpy yet."

"I'll sell it to him," Nelson said, and Van Avery followed him back to the store.

"DETECTIVE!" snorted Handsome. "Who ever heard of a detective who couldn't handle a gun."

"Mebbe he's still actin'," Sleepy put in. "You know, he missed that feller's ear."

"Yeah, he did."

"Not bad shootin', after seein' them ears," said Hashknife dryly. "You were talkin' about men stealin' ore from the Comanche Chief. How do they handle it?"

"You mean, how do they steal it?"

"No; how do they get rid of it? You can't dig coined gold right out of the ground, you know. It has to be minted."

"Hell, I know that. I suppose that's why Steele hired a detective—to find out them things."

"Ain't you and the sheriff been workin' on it any?"

Handsome laughed at the idea.

"I'm afraid we wouldn't be much help," he confessed.

"What about the murder of Corey?"

"Oh, that! We've got the boy who pulled that deal."

"What did he do with the money he stole?"

"Nobody knows but him, and he won't tell. He's Steele's son, and he married Milt Corey's daughter. You seen her at the funeral. She's an awful nice girl, and I shore feel sorry for her. Feel sorry for the old lady too. She's worked mighty hard. You see, the bank won't extend their mortgage no more, and they was a-goin' to foreclose; but Ed Ault loaned the old man ten thousand on a note. That was the ten thousand that Ken Steele got away with, after he popped the old man. Now the Coreys owe Ault ten thousand and the bank ten thousand. That's a hell of a lot of money; more than the Corey ranch is worth."

"What kind of a feller is Ault?" asked Sleepy.

"I'll tell you what kind of a feller he is. Ault was crazy over Gladys Corey,

but Ken beat him out of her. Then Ault turns right around and lends her father ten thousand dollars on a note. Ault ain't no dog in the manger, y'betcha. No, he's all right. Runs his games on the square and behaves himself."

"It seems that most everybody liked Milt Corey," said Hashknife.

"Why not? He was salt of the earth, old Milt was. He wasn't awful pleased over Gladys marryin' Ken, but he never squawked; and when Ken's father told him to git to hell off the place, Corey gave him a job punchin' cows."

"Ken Steele was kinda in debt himself, wasn't he?"

"Yeah. Got drunk a couple of times and shore run in debt. Ken can't play poker worth a darn. I reckon he owed Ault over a thousand dollars. Ault let him run in debt, thinkin' Ken's father would pay the bill; but Silver told Ault to go to hell. Ken had a house here in town, and a couple horses and a few cows; so Ault attached everythin' he owned after Ken was arrested."

"Pretty tough deal on the Corey family," observed Hashknife.

He and Sleepy wandered up to a Chinese restaurant, where they ordered a meal.

"Well, we know what we was sent here to do," said Sleepy. "Personally, I ain't lost no higraders; and if you take my advice, you'd wire the Cattlemen's Association that we had resigned and was headin' for a high hill again."

TO BE CONTINUED

Elk

By

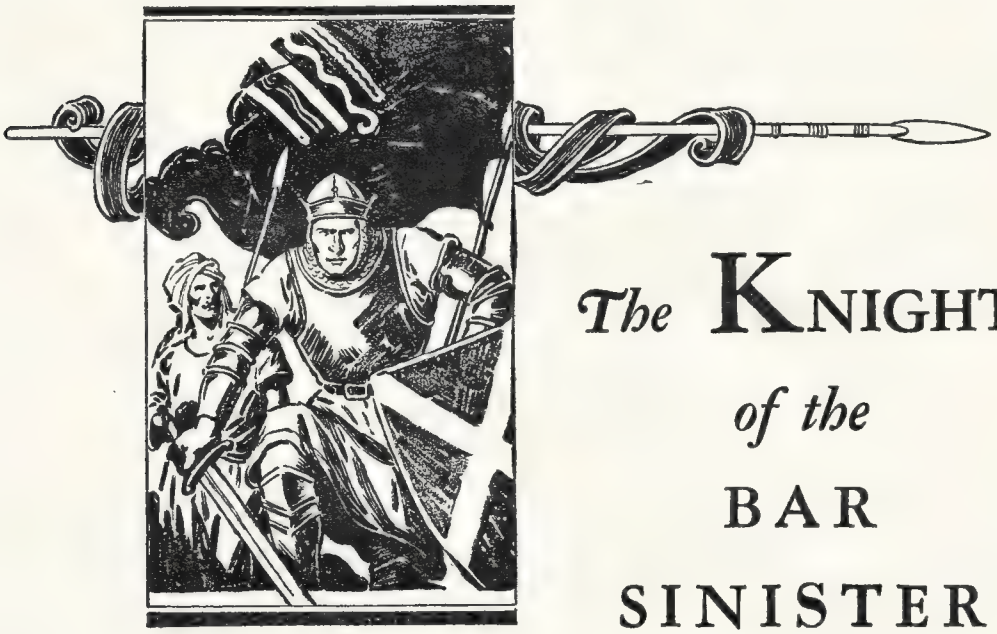
JOHN C. FROHLICHER

Before the blizzard's blare the elk herd sifts
Across the boundary toward bottom land
Along the Yellowstone. Since hunting's banned
Inside the park, the royal leader lifts
His nose disdainfully as man-smell drifts
Through barren aspen groves. The first pale light
Suffices as the hunter draws his sight.
Elk killed like that big bull are easy gifts!

Most mountain hunters know the aching thigh
And swollen foot that comes from hiking high
And far, indeed, for any shot they take.
Those fellows give the elk an even break.
An easy kill, like that bull fallen now?
They'd rather hunt a barnyard, kill a cow.

By DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

Author of "Glenallan of the Clans"



The KNIGHT *of the* BAR SINISTER

GUY of Beirut stared out of the window. It was a clear, cold night, but moonless. The sounds were becoming fewer—shuffling of feet across the yard below, the closing of doors in remote parts of the palace, the lazy music of a dulcimer from the harem, the tramp of sentinels.

"I think we can start our little adventure soon, comrade."

Hugh de Montmorency stirred on his pallet.

"Our mail and swords will be in the chambers of the *atabeg's* son," Guy promised. "I heard the command given this afternoon. It seems the boy was eager to examine Christian gear, so it was taken to him."

Hugh murmured:

"Fortunate that you speak this infidel tongue; it means nothing to me. But then, I was not born here."

Guy glanced sharply at him, and for an instant his dark eyes flashed. These two young men had been virtual strangers when they were captured in a raid two months previous; and, as prisoners of Nureddin since that time, they had been too much in each other's company. That was unfortunate. For Hugh de Montmorency, rich, strong, immensely proud of his name, was newly arrived from Normandy and was filled with a special contempt, which he never tried to conceal, for such as Guy who had been born in the Holy Land.

And Guy, a sensitive, short tempered fellow at best, the natural son of the Christian Count of Tripoli and of a Syrian woman in Beirut, did not enjoy the Norman's ceaseless boasting about his family.

Their confinement had not been rigorous. They had been permitted to wander at will about the palace. They had been well treated, for the *atabeg* still hoped that their ransoms would be paid. Montmorency had spent most of this time complaining about the absence of wine. But Guy, by nature keen and inquisi-

tive, had poked impatiently here and there, investigating things, asking questions. He spoke not only the Pullani lingo—the compromise language used by Franks and Syrians alike—but also reasonably pure Arabic. So it was Guy who had conceived the escape plot and made all the arrangements; while Hugh had done nothing but agree, in a condescending manner, to participate.

True, they had sworn on a crucifix that they would make no attempt to escape. But every knight knew that an oath made to an infidel was no real oath at all and the breaking of it no sin.

"If you will come here, good Hugh," Guy said presently, his voice a shade harsher than usual, "I'll show you the steps I spoke of."

Hugh rose and ambled to the window. Guy pointed.

"Lean far over . . . You see? They make it easier for the guard to mount the wall there, but they also make it easier for us to get over that wall. Even in our mail, the drop to the street would not be great. After that—" He shrugged.

There was no sound at all now, not even the pacing of the sentries. The two knights looked at each other, nodded and sank to their knees. They prayed briefly, and soon thereafter left the apartment.

Outside it was very dark. Guy leading the way, they walked fast, feeling along the wall until they came to a broader passage hung with bright rugs and tapestries. At one end was a copper lamp from which ascended the smoke of incense, filling the place with the odor of Mangalorium sandalwood. At the other end was a grating of thin, twisted bars beyond which was the inner court. The bars, painted and gilded, were merely decorative. Even Hugh was able to squeeze his bulk between two of them.

They walked around two sides of the court, keeping to the shadows of the arches, and climbed through another grating. They passed along a multitude of corridors and across several large, gloomy chambers until Guy pushed aside an arras, discovering a chamber larger than any they had yet seen.

"This is it," he whispered.

There was no lamp, but from a rectangular window a faint light was diffused through the chamber and reflected somberly at odd and unexpected places—by a thin glass rosewater sprinkler, the polished top of a taboret, a jasperite inset in the side of an ebony chest, a glazed earthenware pitcher and the bare breast of a monstrous Nubian slave.

On an ottoman by the side of the slave lay two suits of mail, two helmets, two bucklers, two sheathed falchions, two surcoats. Guy's information had been correct; and two knightly hearts beat faster at the sight of this harness which made liberty seem so very close.

But the Nubian had heard something. He came noiselessly across the chamber toward the arras, a naked scimitar held in front of him. And as the Nubian stepped out into the corridor, Guy of Beirut sprang.

THE thing happened very quickly. The scimitar went spinning across the floor, glittering like a comet. There was a short, sharp clang of steel on marble, silenced instantly as a cymbal is silenced when a hand is placed upon it. There was a grunt of amazement from the blackamoor. Then two figures merged into one and fell to the pavement.

Hugh fumbled for the scimitar, ignoring his companion's plight. But before he got back with it the Nubian was motionless, while Sir Guy sat resting against the wall, his breath coming in soft gasps.

"Is he dead?"

"He is dead," muttered Guy, rising. "And by the Virgin, I would give my very honor for a beaker of malmsey now!"

Evidently nobody had heard the scimitar fall. The palace was utterly silent. So they stole into the big chamber and donned their war gear and strapped on their swords.

Sir Hugh's mail was the finest Milan, covering every part of his body from shoulders to feet. The surcoat was English linen; it was yellow, and on the breast a big red cross marked off four bright blue eagles with extended claws—the Montmorency arms. A much smaller red cross, made of silk, was sewn on the right shoulder.

Sir Guy's armor was poorer, but tough and well nicked. His chest was protected by a jacket of leather on which were sewn overlapping rectangular plates of steel. His sleeves and mittens, leggings and skirt were of mail; his camail was pennyplate. Rips and patches, and many rains and suns, had all but obliterated the device on his crimson surcoat. This device was a large open cross of yellow, three-pointed at the ends, over which, diagonally, was a blue bar—the bar sinister over the proud arms of Toulouse.

"I have been thinking, good Guy—"

"Sh-h! Remember, we are not out yet!"

The hang of steel upon his shoulder, the heft of his buckler, the grip of a sword belt around his waist had rendered Sir Hugh reckless. He stretched and seemed to expand. He grunted.

Guy of Beirut, smaller, taut as a bowstring, watched him with narrowed eyes. More than ever was the Norman's attitude that of a good natured master addressing a somewhat overbold varlet; and Guy's cold fury, slow to accumulate, was getting close to the bursting point.

"No matter what I was thinking," Hugh said in a quieter voice. "Yes, we must get out first. Lead the way, my friend."

They went toward the harem wing, past which ran a long dim corridor lined with tubbed palms and ending in a balcony overlooking the outer court. Here they paused.

"We could jump it," Guy explained, "but they might see or hear us. It will be easier if the door at this end of the passage is unlocked. That leads to the court."

The door was locked, but the lock was not a strong one and the door itself was not heavy. Sir Hugh pulled at it, pushed it with his shoulder, then pulled again. The process was a noisy one.

"I think we should go over the balcony," Guy suggested with some impatience. "I had planned that if—"

"I care naught for what you planned!" Hugh snarled.

He continued to jar the door, making even more disturbance. Guy, angered, watched him. Heaven knew, this was no time to quarrel. Suddenly Guy glanced over his shoulder, then gasped a warning:

"Mother of God! *Look!*"

The Norman spun around. Standing in the corridor, only a few feet away, were three gaping eunuchs. Apparently they had just emerged from one of the harem doors which opened upon this corridor. Then the eunuchs vanished, screaming.

Guy shouted:

"The balcony! Come!"

Doors were slamming now. The screams of the eunuchs and the hoarse shouting of guardsmen on the walls were all but drowned in the clangor of an alarm gong in the yard.

They reached the balcony together. It was a tiny thing. Sir Hugh pushed past his companion, stepped out and vaulted the rail.

Guy paused for a moment. To jump immediately would mean to fall on top of Hugh and probably break one of the Norman's bones. So not until Hugh had risen did Guy vault the rail after him.

He fell on his hands and knees. Somebody sprang out of the shadows and dropped upon him. He reached for his poniard, but his right arm was pinioned behind him. He rolled, desperate, shouting—

"Assist me, comrade!"

Hugh de Montmorency called over his shoulder as he raced up the fortification steps—

"Assist yourself, you halfbreed!"

He reached the top of the wall and disappeared.

Guy, with a terrific effort, twisted free of his assailant and ran for the steps. But four soldiers reached that part of the wall before him, and four bows were bent, four arrows aimed at his throat. He turned. Other soldiers were running across the yard, converging upon him. He was surrounded. He shrugged and threw down his falchion.

The soldiers, taking him away, saw that he was muttering, and they rightly supposed that he was praying. But he was not praying for mercy—not Guy of Beirut! His dark eyes almost closed, his face purple with rage, he was praying between thin, hard lips for the strength to live until he could meet Hugh de Montmorency again.

THE Saracens did not kill Guy. Instead they locked him in a dungeon where he remained for months, visited once a day by a slave who either couldn't or wouldn't speak any dialect with which Guy was familiar. Somehow, he survived. He forced himself to take such exercises as the limited space would permit. He prayed for hours on end; but, except in prayer, he forbade himself to talk aloud for fear he would go mad.

Most of the time he sat and brooded about Hugh de Montmorency. His only recreation was killing rats. He would lie for hours, feigning sleep, not moving a muscle until they ventured close to him, and then he would snatch at them. Sometimes he was bitten, but his was a tough hide and wounds never troubled him much. When he caught a rat he would take it by the tail and swing it around and around, beating its head against a wall, crowing, gloating, laughing at the thing. At last he would fling the bloody carcass into a corner; dark hatred would overspread his features again, the laugh would die and he would return to his thoughts of Montmorency.

One day the guards took him outside and put him into a caravan. The court, he learned, was moving from Damascus to Aleppo.

He learned other things on that dusty, brawling trip. He picked up bits of information from camel drivers, slaves and a loquacious *mullah.* For example, he heard that soon after the Norman's escape, Abu el-Kasim Mahmud el-Malek el-Adel Nureddin—son of Imadeddin Zangi, grandson of Aksankar, Prince of Syria, Atabeg of Aleppo and Damascus, Overlord of Egypt and Yemen, Pillar of the True Faith, Glory of the West, etc, etc—that Nureddin, then, had died. And Nureddin had been succeeded by his only son, Ismail Saleh, a lad of thirteen.

Probably it was this change in politics which had saved Guy's life. For the change had been a considerable one, and Ismail Saleh ruled outright, with absolute power and not through a regent. Yet Ismail Saleh was in turn ruled by a most extraordinary creature, his former instructor in etiquette, a eunuch of the harem called Gumushtagen. The lords of the court were bitterly opposed to the rule of this manumitted slave, but they were powerless to break his hold upon the boy *atabeg.*

Now Gumushtagen—Guy learned—was a shrewd fellow in the divan, but understandably no warrior. And war was approaching. Not war with the Franks, who were contented enough in their cities along the seacoast, except some hotheads among them who, like Hugh de Montmorency and the Bastard of Beirut, got into trouble by refusing to recognize treaties of peace. No, not war with the Franks; but war with the *atabeg's* own men, the cream of his army, now coming home from Egypt.

That homing army was led by a military genius, Saladin Yusuf, son of Ayub, whose ambitions, long suspected, at last were an open secret. It was because of the news that Saladin was coming north that the *atabeg* and his court were moving to Aleppo, a walled city with superior fortifications. Saladin commanded veterans who loved him. But there were only novices to defend the city—novices led by discontented, almost rebellious nobles under the actual command of a fat and effeminate politician.

This much Guy had learned before the caravan finally reached Aleppo and he was shut into a second dungeon similar in every important respect to the one in Damascus, except that at first the rats were bolder.

There he remained for several months until, most unexpectedly, four soldiers came to conduct him to a council chamber upstairs and to confront him with a splendid group of dignitaries. He was stiff and haggard; his beard and hair were long, dirty, uncombed. But he bowed sardonically.

"I am honored, water drinkers," he said.

A small, frightened boy in blue and black was the only person present who was seated. His hands were folded in his lap, his fingers a mass of signets, scarabs and seals—cairngorm, steatite, licure, carnelian, sard. His turban was caught up by a huge sapphire aigret, and there were many gold chains around his neck.

Nearest to this potentate stood Gu-

mushtagen, the eunuch. He was a tall, flabby creature, with round, kindly, innocent eyes, a grave mouth and pudgy, pale hands. An ivory triangle was hung around his neck, and he wore no jewelry except the crescents of beaten gold in his ears.

Gumushtagen prostrated himself before the boy and struck his forehead on the pavement.

"May I speak," he asked, "and live?"

Accorded this permission, he rose and addressed Guy.

"You are called Guy of Beirut, son of the Count of Tripoli?"

Guy nodded, expressionless.

"It is said of you that you are one of the greatest fighters in the world. It is also said of you that you know much about siege machinery."

The eunuch glanced at the others, but without moving his head. They all were staring solemnly at the prisoner.

"Christian, the traitorous and rebellious Saladin Yusuf—may his name be cursed forever—is outside the city threatening the rule and the very life of his rightful sovereign, the thrice-blessed Ismail Meleksaleh, Atabeg of Aleppo and Damascus, Overlord of Egypt and Yemen, Prince of Syria—" The eunuch continued at some length, for he was a learned fellow and knew every one of the boy's titles. When he had finished he bowed very low before the *atabeg,* who paid him no attention but stared only at the prisoner.

There was silence. Then Guy asked—

"And what has all this to do with me, pray?"

Circuitously, with many formal phrases, the eunuch at last made his offer. The army of Saladin greatly outnumbered the defending army; and in addition, the traitor had hired sundry Christian adventurers from the seacoast, who were aiding him in the erection of attack machines. The walls were not strong, and it was feared that the city would fall. Would Guy of Beirut consent to take command of the defense? He would be given his freedom if he did so.

Guy croaked—

"And of what use would be my freedom, if I'm to be slaughtered by Saladin's men, anyway?"

The eunuch argued at considerable length. He wheedled. He even tried to bluster. But Guy only shook his head.

The eunuch, impassive, unmoved by insults, whispered for some time with the *atabeg,* who nodded. Then Gumushtagen addressed the prisoner again.

"We regret your refusal. It is as Allah wills. But one much smaller boon we would ask of you: that you go to the walls and study the banners of the Christians in Saladin's army. Perhaps you could identify them for us?"

This offer the knight accepted with alacrity. Only the eunuch accompanied him, but three bodyservants trailed them and four soldiers went ahead to beat a path through the crowds. They ascended a tower of the north gate, where the eunuch waved.

"These are the Christians."

IT WAS a cold, raw morning; there was only a faint breeze. Guy estimated that there were about three hundred men in the Christian camp, which was located about half a mile from the gate. There were some Armenian foot, two squadrons of Maronite archers and four knights with square banners.

"That blue with the silver scallops is the device of Robert de la Rochelle . . ."

Sunlight was beginning to seep through slowly expanding clouds, and the Bastard, squinting, shaded his eyes.

"That red and ermine with the gold label would be Raoul de Harcourt—there's a fighter for you! The two sable chevrons on yellow mean a De Monson, probably Philip of Antioch." He turned, smiling grimly. "I must congratulate you, eunuch. You are to die at the hands of a very distinguished company."

"And the larger yellow one?"

Guy shook his head.

"Not enough breeze—I can't see it well."

They walked around the walls together. There was no fighting at this hour. On the east side, safely out of range of all except the biggest machines, a few hundred Egyptians were constructing wickerwork sheds. Nearer the walls some Damascenes were filling ditches in order to give the cavalry a clear field. Most of the other soldiers were back in the avenues between the

tents and pavilions, engaged in unimportant duties. Now and then small bodies of horsemen would ride past, very close to the walls, defying the archers in the towers, flourishing lances, yelling war cries. A huge onager, far back on the south side, was hurling rocks into the city, but all these were falling in the same spot and not doing any damage.

Courteously but persistently, in his smooth, low voice, Gumushtagen returned to the original topic of conversation.

"If the Emir Shadbakht is appointed, Jemaleddin will object. If Jemaleddin is appointed, the sons of Daya will refuse to fight. And so it is. But they all would follow so famous a warrior as Guy of Beirut."

Guy laughed. It was good to be in the open air again, and he had been paying scant attention to the eunuch's proposal.

"A fool could see that the city will fall, even though I defend it myself," he said. "Those men out there—De Harcourt, De Monson, De la Rochelle—they are my friends. They will spare me when they are busy murdering all you barbarians. But they would not spare me if I had been fighting against them."

They found themselves back at the north gate tower. The sun was fully up at last, glancing in glory upon the bright banners and helmets and glass-like spearheads that were banked around the tents on the plain. The air was warmer, the breeze more lively.

Guy stopped. His eyes grew big with amazement. His mouth fell open and he grasped Gumushtagen's arm. Then he pointed.

"Tell me, what do you see on that banner?"

The largest of the four standards in the Christian camp, lifted and steadied by the breeze, displayed a scarlet cross on yellow, and four spread-eagles of blue. And Gumushtagen remembered where he had seen that device before, as Guy shouted in his ear:

"Eunuch, get me my gear! Assemble the captains in the palace yard. Tell them I have taken command of the defense!"

FROM that hour the whole nature of the siege was changed. The Bastard of Beirut—a whirlwind of activity, a volcano of hard oaths—seemed to be everywhere at once. Now he was striding along the wall top, careless of stones and arrows. Now he was in a tower, haranguing the archers, relocating the scorpions, ordering up more quarrels. Now he was examining a parapet, tamping the stones from the inside to gage the strength of the mortar, rearranging the wicker screens behind which the slingers worked.

He caused all the machines to be tested, and he strengthened their tormentae with windlasses. He personally examined every piece of armor and every weapon in Aleppo. He ordered much of the mail to be rebanded. He collected all the whetstones in the city and had these placed on the walls and towers as well as in the streets just under the walls, so that any soldier could sharpen his blade without quitting his post.

In each tower he stationed an artisan who was equipped with glue, gut, cord and wiseblase in order to mend split bows, replace strings and repair machines.

"The attack will be made against the north wall, probably near the gate," he told Gumushtagen that first night.

The eunuch listened with rapt, child-like attention, while Guy ate and talked at the same time. Guy called for wine. He got it. The restrictions were not so severe, now that the pious Nureddin was dead; and Guy had shouted that whatever these lady-like Saracens might prefer, *he* could not fight on water.

"They're building a castle over near the Rochelle pavilion. That means a ram, and the wall there won't stand much ramming. Tomorrow I'll have it shored up with timber, but there isn't time to do the job properly. I've had the mangonels brought down there. They never should have been placed on top of the wall when it's in that condition. The recoil loosens the mortar."

He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and ran meat-greasy fingers through his hair. He took a deep drink of wine.

"Those Egyptians are bringing their 'sows' around there, too. They'll try to fill up the moat."

He rose, calling for his sword and helmet. His talk was not for the purpose of edifying the round eyed eunuch, but merely a symptom of nervousness. He was wondering what answer Hugh de Montmorency would send to his challenge; he had dispatched a messenger to the Christian camp, inviting the Norman to meet him in single combat on the plain between the armies.

He got Montmorency's answer when some soldiers handed him a human head which had been shot into the city by a machine. It was the head of the messenger.

Then Guy's eyes became very small, and the color was jerked out of his lips. For a time he breathed with difficulty; then his eyes suddenly opened, and he stared around. The soldiers were gaping at him, unmindful of their labors. He still was holding the head, and blood was running down both his sleeves.

He tossed the head contemptuously aside. He drew his falchion and swished the air.

"To your posts!"

The soldiers scampered away.

THE next day, as he had predicted, three sows moved out of the Christian camp and approached the moat near the north gate. The sows were square, rickety sheds made of wicker and rawhide. They moved to the very edge of the moat, which presently began to fill with rocks shoveled into it from under the sows.

Guy pelted them with the heaviest javelins and lead slugs that could be shot from scorpions and petraries, directing that the cords be drawn as far back as the strength of the soldiers and the power of the tackle would permit. But the sows weathered the shower. Guy shot flaming darts at them, but they had been treated to withstand fire. He tried toppling boulders on them, but they would not come close enough to the wall to make this trick successful.

He did manage, late in the afternoon, by sheer persistence, to batter a sizable hole in one of the awkward structures; and the archers poured dart after dart through that hole. The fourteen men inside, succumbing to panic, foolishly broke cover and started to run for the camp. The archers picked off every one of them.

The other sows stuck to their appointed tasks, and by nightfall the moat was partly filled.

"They're building another castle out there now," Guy reported that night. "That means two rams."

Gumushtagen, who could not eat with Guy because of the difference in their faiths, sat watching him, wide eyed. It was comparatively quiet in the palace just then. They could hear the dull *thamp* of the throwing levers on the mangols as they hit the recoil pads, the blurred shouts and screams of soldiers and the angry voices of captains, the resounding crashes of boulders that struck and crushed whole houses near the wall, the hollow rumble of platforms on which ammunition was moved to the machines, the ring of hand arms and the knocking together of lances. When all of these noises would die for a moment, there still was audible an undercurrent of sound—the scuffle of many feet, the groans and grunts of wounded men, the twang of bowstrings, the rattle of windlass chains, the whine of angry arrows, and the perpetual, maddening *pit-pit-pit* of lead slugs that struck within the city.

"If there was a sally-port within three hundred lance lengths of where they're working, I might give them something to worry about. But there isn't. That's one reason why they picked that part of the wall." Guy jammed a large piece of meat into his mouth and thoughtfully licked the gravy from his fingers. "I'd like to have my hands around the throat of the fool who designed these walls," he muttered.

The eunuch ventured to ask—

"Do—do you think they will succeed?"

"Succeed?" Guy looked up suddenly, his eyes hard. "By the fleas in St. Peter's beard, eunuch, do you suppose this place can be held with what we have here against an army like that?" He shook his head. "They should be cutting our throats in about three days. Four at the most."

He pounded on the table.

"I want more wine!"

It was noon of the next day when the first completed castle emerged from the Christian camp. Guy of Beirut watched it from a tower.

The castle was a huge, square structure made of wood, covered in front with rawhide and iron sheeting. It was three stories tall, and the top was exactly level with the top of the wall at this point. In the bottom story was a battering ram, iron headed and thick. In the second story were men with bores and gripping staves on which were fastened copper hooks. The third story appeared to be unoccupied; but alert Maronite archers crouched behind a breastwork of bucklers on the roof.

The whole clumsy edifice rumbled over the plain, propelled from within and moving on rollers. It lumbered over the stones that filled the moat and came close to the wall. And soon the ram was put into action.

Thunk! The ram did not move far, for it was suspended from the ceiling of the first story only by short turns of rope. But it was swung with a regularity and a force that suggested the inevitable pounding of the sea.

The bores assisted. They were miniature rams, each worked by a soldier in the second story. They were used on individual stones, which they struck with great persistence, stopping sometimes to permit the men with gripping staves to try to chip out the mortar from around those stones.

Thunk! Thunk!

The main portion of Saladin's army was making a demonstration against the east side of the city, where trumpets were blown and banners and scaling ladders displayed. But the man from Beirut was not fooled. He kept three-quarters of his men within calling distance of the north gate.

He brought up tow-wrapped darts, instructing that they be shot at the sides of the castle rather than at the front, for the sides were not so well protected. But the Maronites were vigilant, and a shower of quarrels made it dangerous for the soldiers of the *atabeg* even to show their heads above the breastworks. The defenders were frightened, disheartened. Guy raged back and forth among them, swearing in French, shaking his fist, striking reluctant workers with the flat of his blade.

Thunk! Guy himself, holding a long wooden fork, stepped out on the unprotected wall top. A few of the men, ashamed, climbed out after him. *Thunk!* Darts, shot from less than three lance lengths away, fairly rattled upon his body like raindrops in a storm; they clanged against his helmet, stuck in the crevices of his sleeves and camail and ripped long rents in his surcoat. The men who had followed him either dropped in their tracks, unprotected as they were by complete armor, or else took fright and returned to the shelter of the arrayed bucklers. But Guy held his own buckler over his head to protect his face, and waded through the storm of missiles like a man walking against a terrible wind. He lowered the fork and tried to catch the head of the ram. But the task was too much for one man, and soldiers below easily knocked the fork out of his hands.

Thunk! Slowly, without turning, without lowering his buckler, he retreated. He reached behind him, and somebody handed him the sacks filled with horsehair which he had prepared against this emergency. The sacks were wet, so that they could not be fired; and long ropes were attached to them. Guy, feeling with his right hand, not daring to look around his shield, lowered them over the side of the wall and fastened them into place.

Then for a time the thunking was deadened. And for a time, too, the rattle of quarrels against Guy's shield ceased. He was about to retreat, satisfied, when he heard a familiar voice—

"Ho, halfbreed, are you defending this hovel single handed?"

The Bastard's buckler went down. Hugh de Montmorency stood among the Maronites on the castle top, scarcely a dozen feet away. The Maronites had not drawn their bows. They were watching Guy curiously.

"I am only keeping from idleness until you summon the courage to meet me in honest fight!"

Hugh de Montmorency smiled.

"I kill mongrels who get in my way," he called, "but I'd not disgrace my blood

by tilting with the son of a street woman!"

He nodded to the Maronites, and the bows came up again. Guy raised his shield, but was not quite quick enough. One arrow tore his right cheek and lodged behind his camail, under the right ear. He scarcely felt the pain, then. But the attack was more than any man could endure. The sheer weight of the missiles drove him back, step by reluctant step, stumbling, to the protection of the breastwork. And as he went, he heard the ram begin its deadly work again. Soldiers in the second story of the castle had tied knives to the ends of their gripping staves and with these they had cut the ropes by which the sacks were suspended

Guy, swearing wildly, called for chains. But by the time these arrived the castle had retreated, slowly but without trouble. The wall was beginning to sag.

When Guy looked again Montmorency was not in sight.

AT DAWN the next day two castles appeared, and the thunking was resumed pitilessly. During the night Guy had caused long pikes to be fastened on the wall top, protruding in the direction of the enemy; but these were burned by the soldiers in the castles, who reached out with torches tied to the ends of poles. Twice Guy tried to drop bridges, but this move had also been anticipated, and the bridges were shoved off.

All that day and that night and the next day the rams kept at their work. The men who operated them were relieved under cover of the sows. All pretense of attack elsewhere had been abandoned, and the forces of Saladin were being concentrated on the plain to the north of Aleppo.

One by one the stones were being knocked loose. The besiegers themselves were obliged to support the wall from the outside with long wooden poles in order to keep it from falling before they were ready to have it fall. Guy knew that when they were prepared for the final attack they would burn these props so that a whole section of the wall would tumble at once. Anticipating this, he forced every man who was not actively fighting to help in the erection of a wooden palisade behind the fortification steps where the wall would come down. It was a poor enough second line of defense, but the best possible under the circumstances.

"But it will do no good," he told Gumushtagen that night. "They'll have another ram for it, and be through it in an hour."

Nevertheless, to keep heart in the men, he went about the last minute preparations as carefully and as thoroughly as if he were expecting aid at any hour.

All the next day the rams were pounding, and the wall sagged more and more. Again and again it was propped up; there were twenty such props by nightfall. Meanwhile, Guy had the city gates so sealed that they could not be opened from the inside without great labor; this was to prevent a handful of invaders from getting in and dropping the draws for the rest of Saladin's army. He had the falariques discharge numberless caltrops, which soon covered the plain to confound the enemy horse. He had long, slanting spikes erected outside the palisade. He had all the mangons and mangonels dismantled, so that they could not be captured and turned against the defenders. He had the outside of the palisade covered as completely as possible with raw skins and sheets of iron.

On the twelfth day of the siege, and the seventh of Guy's command, there was an ominous silence in the enemy camp. Occasional bodies of horse rode across the plain, shouting defiance; but the sows did not appear, nor did the castles, and the machines were silent. The day was dark and chilly. The end was near, and Guy knew it.

About noon he climbed to the tower of the north gate. Two sows were out on the plain now, traveling with a rickety motion from prop-end to prop-end, soaking these with oil and firing them. The flames slid gleefully up the poles, reaching with sly fingers, wrapping themselves around and around. The enemy's full battery of machines was put into operation. Rocks began to strike the wall, which trembled and sagged far out.

That accounted for the silence of the morning. They had been bringing around the machines for the final crash.

The sows rumbled away, having fired all the props.

Behind Guy and below him there was a swelling murmur of prayer. The men who were left were asking Allah to protect them from death, their wives from dishonor, and their children from torture and slavery. A bearded *mullah* stood in their midst, a copy of the Koran in his hands.

"When the sun shall be folded up, and the stars shall fall, and when the mountains shall be set in motion; when the she-camels shall be left, and the wild beasts shall be gathered together; when the seas shall boil, and souls be paired again with their bodies—"

The *mullah* had a round, deep voice which rolled valiantly over the housetops and rose even above the sound of the crashing rocks. The Bastard of Beirut listened, without looking, and his lips were pressed tight together. The soldiers in the tower appealed to him with wide, frightened eyes. He nodded curtly.

"You may go, yes."

They hurried down the steps to join the prayers.

"—when the female child that was buried alive shall be asked for what crime she was put to death; when the leaves of the Book shall be unrolled—"

Rocks crashed against the wall with terrible force, shaking the very ground underneath. Bits of stone flew in all directions where each rock hit, and there was a flurry of dust.

The Bastard of Beirut, alone on the tower now, knelt. He drew his sword and kissed its cross shaped hilt; and he held the sword in front of him while he prayed. He prayed but briefly to St. Ann, more lengthily to the Virgin. It was not often that Guy ventured to appeal directly to the Virgin; but this occasion justified it.

"—when the heavens shall be stripped away, and the fire of hell blaze forth, and paradise draw near—then shall every soul know what it hath done!"

The voice of the *mullah* was loud and full. But Guy of Beirut prayed quietly, very seriously, his eyes closed, the hilt of the falchion close to his lips.

Then the last flaming prop collapsed, and with a sound like thunder the wall fell.

GUY sprang to his feet. Through a cloud of gray and brown dust he could see the beginning of the charge; and even above the sounds of falling stones he could hear the battle cries of the attackers and the shrieking of their monstrous horns. He could see the whole force move forward, a broad blaze of steel and bright color

But he did not stir. He cared nothing for the fate of Aleppo; desperation was a better captain than he, and the defenders had plenty of that.

A battering ram, small, green painted, was brought up from behind, and two dozen men were set to work on it. The muscles slid back and forth in great lumps on their bare backs. Shouting captains urged them on. The poles of the palisade split down the middle. Long, thick splinters flew in all directions each time the ram hit. One more blow, and a portion of the palisade a lance length across was torn open like paper. There was a swelling medley of war cries, a rush of gayly colored turbans and tossing plumes, the flash of scimitars.

But victory was not so easily won. A counter-attack, wedge shaped and terrible, crumpled the invaders, drove them back. The opening was not big enough. The two castles had been wheeled up, and archers on the tops of these were stuffing rags soaked with naphtha into the trispaces of their fire arrows. Soon the air was filled with whistling streaks of flame. Black smoke hung in long, sluggish ribbons. Hot missiles flew over the heads of the fighters into the trembling timber.

The smoke thickened so that it was almost impossible for Guy to see the fighting. The scene below him was like hell. The weapons of the Mamelukes, their garish accouterments, flashed back the light of the flames with an awful red glare. Their features become black from soot, distorted. Their eyes were

like the eyes of demons.

Presently a breeze arose, and some of the smoke was blown away. And then Guy saw what he had been seeking all this while, and he sprang for the tower steps, yelling for his horse.

He had marked the spot well. He tore through the horde of pushing Mamelukes, cutting right and left.

"St. Ann! St. Ann, with me!"

His horse stumbled, fell to its knees, but got up again. Guy, swinging his falchion as though it were a stick of bamboo, was a madman now with a madman's inexplicable strength. Somebody grabbed one of his legs. It was too close for a falchion stroke, so he drew his poniard and leaned over, slashing. But a lance caught him on the left shoulder, another under the left arm, and he fell from the saddle. He rolled swiftly. Somebody's knee struck him full in the face. He rose shouting.

Then he saw again the red and yellow banner, the blue eagles. Alone and on foot he charged it.

Hugh de Montmorency saw him coming and laughed.

"Ah, my little Pullani friend!"

He swung a mace-at-arms. The blow caught Guy on the left shoulder. He spun half around, thrown against a shrieking Mameluke. But he sprang back toward Montmorency.

"St. Ann with me!"

Sir Hugh hit again. Guy sidestepped, avoiding the blow, and Hugh tumbled from his saddle. Guy sprang upon him.

But the Montmorency, for all his size, was agile enough in battle. Laughing, he got to his knees, his shield above his head. Guy's blow glanced off the shield. And an instant later Sir Hugh was standing.

They faced each other, panting. Hugh smiled slowly.

"So we meet again, Bastard?"

Guy said nothing. He threw down his buckler and gripped his falchion in both hands. He stepped in, swinging blow after blow. And there they fought, in the very center of the charging host of Saladin. Nobody interfered with them —nobody dared to. In silence and fury they fought. And the struggle was even until Hugh's mace-at-arms was knocked from his hands. The Norman speedily reached for his sword, but Guy was too quick. He snatched a poniard and struck . . .

Alone and on foot, Guy of Beirut made his way back to the protection of what remained of the palisade. Blood oozed gently from his mouth and nose, but he paid it no attention; he was smiling quietly. Jostled, unheeded, he came at last to a place peaceful enough to permit the giving of thanks to St. Ann and Our Lady.

He was rising from his knees when the Emir Jemaleddin touched him.

"By the Prophet, Christian, this is no time for prayers! The battle is not over yet!"

Guy said—

"It is for me."

Jemaleddin was wildly excited. He gestured toward the breach where Saladin's warriors were being driven back. One castle was a mass of flames, and the other was almost surrounded by defenders who had occupied it.

"We can keep the city yet, Christian! One more charge. Drive them back as far as the fallen wall. We can hold that until help comes from Mosul! Their castles are gone, and before—"

But the Bastard of Beirut unstrapped his long sword and threw it at the emir's feet. He started away.

"I'll lead no more, here," he muttered. "I have done what I swore to do. Now I am merely your prisoner. For me the battle's done. I have kept my vow."

Please see Camp-fire this issue for an important announcement

LION'S CLOTHING

By L. G. BLOCHMAN

Author of "Red Wine" and "Almost a Sahib"

"AM BEING instructed to inform you," said Shivajee Bannerjee, the four-chinned babu, to Arsenic Taylor, "that you are on threshold of being slaughtered."

A current of distinctly unpleasant vibrations raced through Arsenic Taylor's sympathetic nervous system. He was afraid to die. That Bannerjee, the prospective slayer's interpreter, was also obviously afraid of something was little comfort in view of the business-like gleam of the long knives stuck carelessly into the sashes of the horse-faced Pathan giants standing behind the babu. A further indication that no levity was intended was the gaping muzzle of an automatic pistol in the fist of a fiercely bearded Punjabi Moslem with the green turban of a Hadji twisted about his head. There was no doubt that Arsenic Taylor was in a tight spot.

Moreover, Arsenic Taylor realized that his precarious predicament was due entirely to an innocent little lie he had tossed off glibly a few hours earlier. People who knew Arsenic Taylor only slightly supposed that this glibness in tossing off lies was the poisonous quality which had given him his nickname, but they were wrong. He was known as Arsenic even when he was a pleasant little tike in short trousers who did nothing more venomous than to run and tell some doting parents that their only son—who was at that moment smoking corn silk behind the woodpile—had been run over by a truck.

The origin of his name could be traced directly to his father, who, being an ardent admirer of the detective stories of Maurice Leblanc, had christened his first born Arsène Lupin Taylor. And from Arsène Taylor to Arsenic Taylor was the matter of a short and inevitable syllable.

The particular glib lie which now promised to prove fatal had been spoken

in a first class compartment of the Punjab Mail which Taylor had been riding that afternoon—without a ticket, of course. To buy a ticket on any railway in India would have been a confession of weakness in Taylor. When a Bengali guard had come around collecting fares Taylor had flown into an impressive rage.

"What? Tickets from me?" he had stormed. "How long have you been working on this line that you don't recognize the Assistant Managing Agent of the E.I.R? And, by the way, why hasn't my luggage and bedding been put into my compartment? Find my bearers at once and tell them where I am. I'm getting down at Myrapur."

When the guard saluted sheepishly and withdrew, Arsenic Taylor was surprised at himself for announcing Myrapur as his destination. Subconsciously he must have been intending all along to visit William Johns at Myrapur—William Johns, whom he had been conscientiously avoiding for some seven years . . .

When he got on the train, however, he was not going *to* any particular place as much as he was going *away* from Allahabad. An old acquaintance had turned up there with an inopportune recognition just at the moment when Taylor had established himself as a wild animal collector from Bronx Park Zoo, out for tigers, and was being lionized accordingly by the more sedentary white population.

Technically, Arsenic Taylor was a tropical tramp, although his motives were not the same as those of others of the roving and unkempt brotherhood to which he was officially assigned. Where others sought only undisturbed leisure and easy liquor, Taylor bustled from port to port, building up compensation for a rather puny physique.

He remained in the Orient because the mere fact of his belonging to the Caucasian race gave him a feeling of superiority. He wore the lion's clothing so frequently that he was almost convinced of the authenticity of his own roars. That others were less impressed did not affect him in the slightest. When his career as bouncer for a waterfront bar in Surabaya—he had posed as an ex-lightweight champion of Australia—ended ignominiously at the hands of a stoker from a Dutch tanker, he turned up in China as a Canadian war aviator, offering his services to the particular Chinese general who at that time happened to be besieging Canton.

He strutted gloriously until the Chinese general got hold of a decrepit old D.H. bomber with which Taylor was to attack Canton from the air; then he was suddenly called to Bangkok on important and mysterious business.

Thus his parading as Assistant Managing Agent of the East Indian Railway was comparatively a minor rôle for Taylor, but it caused a great deal of flurry on the station platform at Myrapur. The train guard had telegraphed ahead so that the sad eyed Eurasian station master would not repeat the mistake of failing to recognize a railway dignitary.

A small crowd had gathered to watch the respectful salaams and listen to the profuse apologies for the guard's failure to locate either the imaginary bearers or the nonexistent luggage. They must have missed connections. Should telegrams be dispatched along the line?

WITH a magnanimous gesture Arsenic Taylor quieted the station master, soothed the guard and sent the Punjab Mail snorting on its way to Calcutta. Until the bearers turned up, Taylor would stay with his friend, the *burra sahib* of the Asiatic Collieries. Did the station master know where he lived?

The station master pointed to the framework of the pit head derrick of a coal mine silhouetted against the last glow of sunset like the skeleton of some strange monster. The European staff of the mine lived in bungalows just beyond. It was about a mile. He would call a *ghari.*

"I'll walk," said Taylor. "I want exercise."

"I'd better send some one with you," said the station master. "These are parlous times. You read about the Asansol bombing, of course."

Taylor had not read of the Asansol bombing. He never read the newspapers. And he walked alone—down

the village street of sun-baked mud huts, pursued by naked brown brats clamoring for *baksheesh;* past the village *bô* tree under which a white haired holy man was holding forth to a ring of disciples squatting in the warm dust; past a final, isolated house, on the sagging tile roof of which flat cakes of cow dung were drying.

Once on the open road, Taylor had the impression that he was being followed. At least, a rickety tonga, drawn by a bony white horse, was dragging along behind him. Two scowling, bob haired hillmen were riding in the tonga. Taylor paid no attention to them until they drew up beside him several hundred yards beyond the village.

The road at this point had swung off from the spur tracks that ran from the main railway line to the colliery. The scorched brown plain rose in two hummocks which hid the village on one side and the mining community on the other. Taylor, striding along with the gait of a bantam rooster, gave no heed to the strategic possibilities of the dip in the road, and only a brief, condescending glance to the two hillmen, enough to decide that they were probably Pathans.

He was a rather important looking individual, despite his short stature, rumpled white clothes and soiled topee. Something about the way he extended his chest, held his elbows a trifle away from his sides as he swung his arms, and the assurance with which he planted his Malacca stick at each third step, would cause most onlookers to accept him at his own valuation. Yet the moment one of the Pathans jumped down from the tonga and grabbed him from behind, all his importance collapsed.

He fought back, but without distinction. He broke his stick over the Pathan's head and planted one fist firmly in his eye, but the Pathan was twice his size. And when the second Pathan sprang from the tonga, the odds were roughly—very roughly, it developed—four to one. It was only a matter of a few seconds before Taylor was battered into submission, tied, stuffed into a burlap bag and loaded into the back of the tonga.

At first Taylor thought that he was the victim of an ordinary dacoity, and he savored in advance the disappointment of the two bandits when they discovered that his entire capital consisted of a square, nickel two-anna bit and three copper pice.

By the time he had choked on jute dust for twenty-five perspiring, jolting minutes in the back of the springless tonga, he guessed otherwise. And when he had been lifted from the tonga, bumped down a stairway, and the burlap bag slit from around him, he was immediately informed by Babu Shivajee Bannerjee that he could look forward to death.

"You are now hostage," explained Bannerjee as an afterthought.

Taylor looked about him. The room was lighted by burning wicks which floated in four red glass bowls filled with oil. The flickering glow revealed the scowling horse-faces of his Pathan captors and the gun in the hand of the bewhiskered Punjabi.

"Hostage?" demanded Taylor. "What for?"

Bannerjee explained that Taylor was prisoner of Qasai, the Punjabi Butcher —whose teeth, at the mention of his name, flashed in a cruel smile through the thicket of his beard. Qasai was leader of the Anti-Non-Violence Wing of the North India Council of Swarajists. Tired of the passive resistance program of Gandhi, Qasai was organizing Northern Moslems to free India by direct action.

Qasai clapped his hands impatiently as the babu was talking. A dozen men ambled out of the shadows—large men, most of them olive-skinned Moslems from the north, three of them bearded Hindus with black turbans symbolizing some dire vow, all of them armed with knives. They salaamed briefly as they filed past Qasai and, in response to an order from him, marched from the room.

"Mr. Qasai's guard returning to camp," explained Bannerjee.

There were a hundred more like them in the immediate neighborhood, awaiting Mr. Qasai's word. In the daytime twenty of them worked in the very house in which Taylor was now a prisoner, making bombs. They made fifty bombs daily. In a few years there would be enough to blow the British out

of India. A start had already been made, in fact. Two bombs had been exploded experimentally at Asansol the previous Saturday night. The experiment had not been entirely successful. One of Qasai's most valued bombers had been blown to pieces and two others had fallen into the hands of the Asansol police. It was for this reason that Taylor had been seized as hostage.

"FROM station master's office we learned you are important personage in East Indian Railway," explained Bannerjee. "Mr. Qasai will keep you prisoner until government returns freedom to two men incarcerationed Asansol-side. You will presently be writing letter asking emancipation of said prisoners. You will say that in case of non-emancipation Mr. Qasai will execute you. If you refuse to write letter, he will also execute you."

Arsenic Taylor's tongue suddenly assumed the consistency of blotting paper. When he tried to moisten his lips his salivary glands refused to function. Somehow he managed to force a laugh.

"Tell Mr. Qasai," he directed, with an effort at bravado, "that he's just cuttin' his own throat. Why, a letter from me would only start troops this way to wipe you all out. Tell him that."

There was an exchange of words in the vernacular. When the babu turned back to Taylor, the worried wrinkles on his glistening brown forehead had deepened. He interpreted:

"Mr. Qasai says he is looking for no mercy from British Raj. He says we are all eager to lay down as many lives possible for freedom of India—from which statement I now make slight personal exception on account of being sole Hindu present and thus lacking Moslems' fatalistical outlook on sudden death. Mr. Qasai says in case of troops you would be slaughtered first. He says you had better use your influence."

With great difficulty Arsenic Taylor swallowed. Influence? He had no influence. There was not a man in all India who would raise a finger to save him. Where he was considered at all, he was esteemed a detriment to white prestige. He was *persona non grata.* He had even been suspected of being an American. Yet he wanted to live. He wanted so desperately to live that at this moment he was prepared to crawl down, shed his mythical glory and admit that he was no *burra sahib,* but a penniless, prevaricating tramp, a mere soldier of misfortune.

"Gents," he said, with an appealing gesture that embraced all the Orientals, "you're on the wrong track. I'm not who you think I am. I never had nothin' to do with the E.I.R, or any other railway. I'm nobody. I got neither money nor friends—"

He paused for effect. He was carried away by the passionate note in his own voice. He was reassured by the feeling that his tongue had again come to his rescue.

Bannerjee translated, and Qasai sputtered a quick reply through his whiskers.

"Mr. Qasai says he does not believe you," announced Bannerjee.

Taylor broke out in sudden perspiration. He stared about him and saw only dark determination on the faces of the two Pathans and Qasai the Butcher. Then his eyes fell upon the Gandhi cap and clothes of homespun *kadi* that Bannerjee was wearing. He clutched at a straw.

"Listen, babu," he explained, "how does a good Gandhi man like you get mixed up in all this violence business?"

Bannerjee wagged his large head to one side, a gesture which expressed his entire philosophy.

"Quite true I am passive resister and non-violence person," he said. "But passive resistance proved quite insufficient in face of active abduction which intercepted me near Patna University, where I am pursuing learning—"

"You mean you're here by force?"

"Force can imprison body, but spirit remains indelibly free," said Bannerjee, again wagging his head. "Mr. Qasai had great need of learned person with knowledge of English, Hindu and Punjabi dialects, also Marathi, Gujerati and Pushtu. I am such person—"

"Listen, babu," interrupted Taylor. "A couple o' smart chaps like us ought to bust right out of here. Are you with me?"

Bannerjee's eyes grew round.

"I am violently opposed to violence," he declared vehemently, "particularly when applied to own person. Dangerous complications—"

The sputtering words of Qasai the Butcher broke into the dialogue. Bannerjee translated with a tremulous voice:

"Mr. Qasai says he is busy man and can not wait longer for you to compose mind. You will please write letter as per instructions. He is allowing ten minutes."

The babu produced pen, ink and paper. The pen scratched like a post office pen. Taylor complained of the fact.

"Seven minutes," was Qasai's reply, duly interpreted.

Taylor made several false starts and crumpled three sheets of paper. He cursed. He was never much given to writing. His ingenuity was strictly oral. Besides, he had always had trouble with spelling. He found it difficult to concentrate with Qasai the Butcher ostentatiously toying with the safety catch of his automatic pistol. Perspiration rolled off Taylor's face and made three blurred spots on his latest first paragraph. He asked for a fresh sheet of paper.

"Three minutes," warned the babu, at Qasai's insistence.

TAYLOR made a new start. Suddenly he looked up, his eyes alight with inspiration.

"Look, babu," he said, fishing a dog-eared document from his pocket. "Here's my identification papers. They'll show that I ain't nobody important."

Qasai glanced at the papers. One of his Pathan lieutenants looked at them more carefully. There was an exchange of conversation.

"Mr. Qasai says he understands nothing of writing in foreign languages," said Bannerjee, handing the papers back. "Furthermore, document has air of great age and is probably forged, he says. Are you prepared for execution?"

"Good Lord, babu, listen," Taylor pleaded. "Tell your boss to ask William Johns, the *burra sahib* of the collieries here, about me. He'll tell you I ain't nobody and there'd be no use in killin' me. Tell him Johns sahib will explain who I am, and he's important enough so you can believe him."

When Bannerjee translated, Qasai's eyes narrowed with the crafty, feline expression of a tiger stalking a water buffalo. After a moment's reflection he made a sharp, sputtering speech, so vehement that the spray accompaniment reached as far as Taylor.

"Mr. Qasai is pointing out impossibility of communicating to or from Mr. Johns," said Bannerjee, "on account of efficient guarding of coal mining community."

"Guards be damned!" said Taylor. "William Johns will come right here to vouch for me not bein' a railway official. Let me go after him, and I'll bring him back here inside the hour."

There was another conference. Qasai's feline eyes widened slowly—the tiger had come upon the buffalo drinking alone at the water hole. He snarled an order. One of the Pathans disappeared, to reappear a moment later carrying a short carbine. Then came explanations through Bannerjee.

Qasai the Butcher would allow Taylor to bring Mr. Johns to clarify his status, under certain conditions. Mr. Johns was to be called for and delivered in a *ghari* furnished by Qasai. Taylor must submit, during the entire transaction, to the custody of the Pathan and his carbine.

The Pathan, it was pointed out, was an excellent shot. He had once made his living shooting traders rash enough to travel through Khyber Pass on days when the Khyber Rifles were off guard. He meant sure death at three hundred yards, a bad insurance risk at five hundred. His presence in the *ghari* was to check any possible thought of treachery by Taylor. The Pathan himself had no objection to dying, as long as he knocked off a few unbelievers first. On the contrary, being a Mohammedan, he looked forward with a certain relish to the Islamic paradise peopled by beautiful women, promised by the Koran to all True Believers who die in the process of killing infidels.

Attempted deception by Taylor would bring quick and positive death. However, if Mr. Johns gave a satisfactory explanation, Qasai the Butcher swore

by the Tomb at Karbala—"Fairly reliable and efficacious oath for Moslem Hadji," was Bannerjee's comment—that he would immediately release Taylor. Did Taylor agree?

On giving an affirmative reply, Taylor was marched down a short, low corridor and up a stone stairway into the open, with the muzzle of the Pathan's carbine pressed into the small of his back as an aid to memory. By the last dim glow of the hot, dusty twilight, he had his first view of the outside of the premises into which he had been introduced in a burlap bag.

His interview with Qasai, he now saw, had been carried on in an underground annex of a low, sprawling, mud-and-tile structure, about which were piled hundreds of great globular earthenware jars. The headquarters of the Punjabi Butcher passed as a *chati*—or pottery —factory.

Several of the armed men Taylor had seen below were squatting in front of the jars, smoking. As Qasai and his second Pathan lieutenant emerged from the house behind Taylor the men rose.

The men departed silently and obediently. Taylor saw them climbing a little hill on which were several score rude huts like shelter tents made of palm leaves. A few winking lights, the glow of a fire, and the indistinct murmur of many voices indicated the location of Qasai's camp of guerrilla soldiers and bomb makers.

As Taylor, prompted by a final prod in the back, was climbing into a *ghari* in front of the house, Shivajee Bannerjee came panting up the stairs.

"Please, sar," he puffed, "while negotiating with *burra sahib* of coal mines, could you not please inquire if gentleman has not perhaps patriotic Indian clerical assistant desiring my place as private secretary. Sudden ardent wish on my part to resume studies at Patna University will be meeting greatest reluctance from Mr. Qasai—"

"*Babu kidhar hai?*—where are you, babu?" interrupted the sputtering voice of Qasai.

"*Ek dom aenga!*—coming immediately!" replied the babu instantly, waddling back into the house with incredible speed for one of his dimensions.

WITH the armed Pathan mounted behind, the *ghari* started jogging down the road. The short tropical dusk dissolved quickly into deep indigo night. Early stars along the horizon were stamped out at frequent intervals by the stiff silhouettes of *tal* palms. The whine of chanted *mantras* came from an isolated *bhustee* beside the road, causing an unfamiliar nostalgic chord to vibrate somewhere inside of Taylor, like a tuning fork responding to its pitch. The chord seemed to have something to do with William Johns . . .

Taylor had no doubt that Johns would come at his bidding; yet the realization that he was using his power over Johns bothered him vaguely. For seven years Arsenic Taylor had maintained a certain self-respect, which at times rose almost to a feeling of nobility, by merely reflecting upon the fact that he had never tried to blackmail an old pal.

Seven years previous, Taylor and Johns had been part of the Great White Experiment of the Asiatic Collieries, Ltd, at the mother mine near Asansol. At that time the manager of operations, a man named Cracken, conceived the idea that the employment of skilled European miners would be profitable, even in the field of cheap native labor because, while the Europeans would receive five times the pay of the Indian, they would turn out eight times as much work as their lackadaisical brown brothers.

So Cracken hired a dozen white miners, including Johns and Taylor—who posed as a miner because it seemed a good idea at the time. Cracken turned out to be a slave-driver. Not being good at mathematics, he looked to the whites for ten times as much work as the Indians, instead of only eight. He used the same whip-hand tactics on whites and browns alike, soon convincing Taylor and Johns that the pick and shovel were not properly part of the white man's burden. Johns, who was a big, hulking individual, once told Cracken to his face that he would delight in killing him with his bare hands. Taylor, who was conscious of his own physical limitations, made similar remarks, but in private.

One day Taylor, seeking Johns underground, found Cracken dead in a stope

that Johns had been working. Some one had driven a pickax through Cracken's skull. Sliding excitedly down out of the stope, Taylor bumped into Johns. Johns instantly went into detail about how he had been absent from the stope for the last fifteen minutes on an unsuccessful search for Cracken, who had sent for him.

Taylor, never more jealous of Johns's broad shoulders, bulging biceps and apparent courage, promptly understood. He smiled knowingly, wrung Johns's hand, told him not to worry and five minutes later had disappeared from the Asansol mine without a trace.

Three reasons inspired Taylor's sudden flight. First, the murder of Cracken occurred at a time when Taylor, fed up to the teeth with manual labor, had been mulling over in his mind the news from the Malay States that gold dredges were active on the Pahang River, and this seemed as good a moment as any to go over and investigate.

Second, his abrupt, unexplained disappearance would divert suspicion from his friend, William Johns, as Cracken's murderer.

And third, his tacit assumption of guilt for the crime—for which he had a perfect alibi, should he ever be actually accused of it—gave him a fine vicarious feeling of having really been the David who slew Goliath Cracken; William John's well developed arms were but his slingshots.

In the ensuing years Taylor became almost convinced of his imaginary daring. He enjoyed hinting darkly of slaying a tyrant twice his size when men in the Pahang gold fields, or in the bars of High Street, Hongkong, or Malay Street, Singapore, referred to him as a cocky little runt.

He also enjoyed hearing how William Johns had benefited by a comrade's noble deed; in the succeeding years Johns had broken through the strict bonds of British caste to attain eminent, if smug, respectability. He had climbed into the managerial ranks of Asiatic Collieries, Ltd; he had acquired a wife and family; and there was a chance that he might receive a decoration the next time a Labor government at home had anything to say about the Honors List.

"KAUN HAI?"

The *ghari* was halted at a barbed wire fence by an armed Sikh guard with a barbed wire beard, who effectively barred the way.

"Chup rao, you bloody *jungli-walla,"* replied Taylor in the best pre-Gandhi manner of Europeans addressing Indian inferiors. "What do you mean by stopping a sahib bound on important business? *Suwar-ka-bacha!* Go on, syce."

The Sikh, overwhelmed by this show of unmistakable authority, apologetically stood aside.

A moment later a second guard near Johns's bungalow grew similarly meek before Taylor's display of importance.

But the *khansama* at William Johns's front door was not so easily impressed. He eyed Taylor's rumpled clothes suspiciously. He demanded to know the exact nature of Taylor's business, as Johns sahib was not to be disturbed for trifles.

"Tell him," said Taylor, standing on the steps of the veranda and keenly conscious of the Pathan with the carbine in the *ghari* not fifteen feet away, "tell him it's about the mine. Very serious, tell him. Matter of life and death."

The *khansama* disappeared. Through the window that gave on the veranda, Arsenic Taylor could see what sort of business occupied his old friend Johns. Four couples, the men in black trousers and short white mess jackets and the women in evening clothes, were seated about two card tables. Taylor shuddered as he contemplated the dread respectability into which Johns had advanced. He knew he was watching the European colony at Myrapur amusing itself: four families; bridge four nights a week; fortnightly excursions to the club at Asansol; Calcutta once every four months.

Taylor saw the *khansama* bend over Johns's shoulder. Johns arose. He had become thicker through the middle; he was a bit more florid of face and gray of temples. A big man like that looks silly in one of those short, white monkey jackets, Taylor thought. The idea that the giant had become soft pleased him.

Johns came to the door, blinked a moment at Taylor, then spoke in recog-

nition.

"Hello, Arsenic," he said, as calmly as if he had last seen him just before dinner instead of seven years previous. "I heard you were still in the East. What—ah—what's all this the *khansama* tells me?"

Taylor could see that Johns was hesitating about asking him into the house. Whether he was at a loss to explain to his friends his relations with a man who had apparently slept in his clothes for a week, or whether he was afraid of extemporaneous remarks about his past, Taylor could not tell. He could only tell that William Johns had become very stolid and imperturbable, a typical bearer of the white man's burden, who could speak fluent Hindustani with a correct English accent and was therefore doubtless considered an authority on Indian problems. He was the very man to impress Qasai.

The Pathan in the *ghari* coughed audibly.

"Bill," said Taylor, "you got to come with me. It's a matter of life and death."

"Whose life?" asked Johns. "I got people in there, Arsenic. If I duck out, somebody'll have to play three-handed. You can't play contract three-handed. I don't—"

"You got to come, Bill," said Taylor. "He keeps callin' for you."

"Who does?"

"I don't know his name," said Taylor, "but he's one of the big bugs in the Asiatic Collieries. He'd got word that something'd gone wrong with the mine and he was on his way up from Asansol when he got waylaid by a couple of dacoits. Lucky I just happened along and beat off the dacoits, but they'd already hurt this bloke pretty bad, so bad I couldn't move him. All he could say was, 'Johns, William Johns', so I came to get you. We'd better hurry, Bill."

William Johns placed a huge hand on Taylor's slim shoulders, affectionately, if a trifle gingerly on account of the condition of Taylor's whites.

"Let's go then, Arsenic," he said.

Taylor did not feel the relief he had expected when Johns walked to the *ghari* with him. Instead, when the carriage with the Pathan looking down on Johns and Taylor from the footman's post in the rear, rolled away from the mine superintendent's bungalow, Taylor again experienced the unfamiliar nostalgic chord vibrating inside of him, the same pang he had felt an hour before. He was puzzled. He found difficulty in drawing a deep breath.

"The ruddy cheek of these beggars," Johns was saying, "going after one of our men. When I first came out to India a dacoit wouldn't dare attack a sahib. We've given them too much leeway, that's all. Did you hear about that bombing thing at Asansol? Rotten business."

"Rotten mess," agreed Taylor automatically.

And it immediately struck him that this was not exactly a savory mess into which he was now leading William Johns. Suppose Qasai the Butcher should kill Johns? The thought had not occurred to him before. Well, Johns could take that chance. Hadn't Taylor taken a similar chance to get Johns out of a fix? Didn't Johns owe his freedom, his respectability, his very life, perhaps, to Taylor's action in running away seven years previous? And even if things did turn out badly, Johns was influential enough to arrange matters; while for Taylor alone the whole nasty business looked like certain death.

"I been thinking about you every now and then, Arsenic," Johns said after a pause. "About the time you ran off from the old collieries when Cracken was murdered. Remember?"

"Why, yes, I remember," said Taylor.

"Everybody thought you'd gone balmy," said Johns. "Of course, I didn't. I realized you'd gone off on my account, thinking to help me because it was me did in old Cracken. The others thought you were the murderer until the man that killed Cracken confessed."

"You confessed?" exclaimed Taylor hoarsely.

"Me? Lord, no!" said Johns. "I didn't kill old Cracken. It was an Ooria coolie who'd gone berserk. Remember that big Ooria that used to push coal wagons underground? He tried to kill the *burra sahib* next day. They sent him to the Andamans for life. Funny you'd never heard."

"I never read the papers," said Taylor. His voice seemed to come from far off.

THE *ghari* creaked and jolted through the night. Arsenic could hear the Pathan breathing behind him, imagined he could feel the man's breath on the nape of his neck and wondered irrelevantly if the Pathan had asthma. Suddenly he blurted:

"Say, Bill, I've made a terrible mistake. I thought you owed me a good turn, and here you don't at all. Otherwise I wouldn't have come for you."

"What's this?" demanded Johns. "How about the chap that's hurt by the dacoits?"

"That was my story to get you out," said Taylor. "I was afraid you wouldn't come. You see, it's me needs help. I'm in an awful jam."

"Ruddy nuisance," said Johns. "Still, I don't mind doing a favor for a pal. What's up?"

"I'm a prisoner, Bill," said Taylor. "This hillman behind us ain't just a *piyada*. He's got a gun. You see, a gang of thugs down the road got the silly idea somewhere that I'm the Assistant Managing Agent of the E. I. R, and they want to hold me for hostage. I said that you could tell 'em I wasn't nobody important, so they told me to bring you."

"Who told you to bring me?"

"A dark, whiskery beggar they call Qasai—"

"Qasai the Butcher?" There was a note of dismay in Johns's voice. "Good Lord, Arsenic, for months that man's been trying his damnedest to get his hands on me. Looks like he's done it after all!"

"You know Qasai?"

"How could I help knowing that old bandit? He's been raising hell around here. Two weeks ago my guards shot one of his men who got inside the mine enclosure with a bomb. Qasai's been sending me threatening chits ever since. I've tried to get some troops down here to wipe out his gang, but government's very damned cautious this year."

"Listen, Bill," said Taylor, perspiring profusely in the darkness. "How the hell was I to know all this? I'm damned sorry, but I'll get you out of this some way. Suppose I jump out of the *ghari* and run for it. The Pathan with the gun will start after me, and that'll give you a chance to get away in the other direction."

"No fear," said Johns. "He won't bother about you as long as he can bring *me* to Qasai. We'll see it through, that's all, Arsenic."

The *ghari* swung off the main road to follow a lane over a little rise to the Qasai arsenal. A moment later it had rolled to a stop in front of the pseudo-*chati* factory.

A guard at the door helped the Pathan footman prod the two Europeans out of the carriage and push them into the stairway.

Arsenic Taylor's heart was making a terrible racket in his chest. His head seemed to be revolving slowly in a fog of befuddlement, as if he had been smoking *bhang* after a three-day drunk.

"I'll—I'll go first," he said on the stairway. "You look a little soft, Bill. In all these years you been wearing monkey jackets, you probably ain't had a proper fight."

"Since when have you got to be such a fighter?" asked Johns.

"I always was," said Arsenic Taylor, "more or less."

Johns grunted.

They were at the bottom of the stairs. The guards, after prodding them halfway down, had returned to the entrance above. A few steps from the door that led to Qasai's council chamber Taylor stopped. He heard excited voices behind the closed door—the sputtering syllables of Qasai, the shrill complaint of Babu Shivajee Bannerjee. He could not understand the language.

"What's the row about, Bill?" he whispered to Johns.

"The chap with the compressed air baritone is going to kill the tenor," murmured Johns, "and the tenor's squealing like a stuck pig about it."

Taylor kicked the door open. The red glow from the oil lights revealed the babu kneeling ponderously in front of Qasai and his Pathan lieutenant. As the door swung in, Bannerjee squirmed half about and flung out his arms toward Taylor.

"Please, sar, succor me!" he squealed. "This Pathan gentleman claiming modicum of English knowledge reports to Mr. Qasai that I am plotting treachery with you, sar. Despite protests of garbled eavesdropping, they are threatening direst death forms, without decent Hindu cremation—"

The babu's speech was cut short by a flash of the Pathan's long knife. The flat of the blade smacked against the side of his face. The babu toppled over on his back and lay on the floor in a dead faint.

The Pathan closed the door and fastened the bolt.

QASAI the Butcher advanced toward Taylor and Johns, pistol in his hand, a contemptuous smile showing through his beard.

"Well, gents," said Taylor in a hollow voice, "here's Mr. Johns to vouch for me not bein' connected with no railway. Tell 'em, Bill, that—"

"Chup rao!" barked Qasai.

"Shut up yourself," said William Johns, keeping his voice well modulated. "You can't talk to a sahib that way!"

Qasai made no comment. He licked his lips with evident relish of the situation and continued to advance. Taylor, taking his cue from Johns, backed away. When Qasai had forced the two men into a corner, he stopped and licked his lips again. He sputtered an order.

The Pathan stepped up with a coil of rope in his left hand. With his right he grasped Johns's arm and jerked him roughly aside.

"Take your hands off me!" Johns demanded. "I came here on a peaceful mission. If you persist in acting this way with sahibs, you'll have to stand the consequences."

For reply the Pathan slipped a loop of rope over his shoulders and started pulling it down toward his elbows.

Arsenic Taylor's eyes strayed a moment from the fascinating muzzle of Qasai's gun. They lingered briefly on the face of William Johns, no longer florid but the color of wet chalk, aghast at the failure of race and position to cow these Oriental cutthroats. They passed on rapidly to the dome-like abdomen of the supine Babu Shivajee Bannerjee, rising and falling in faint rhythm as he breathed. And Arsenic Taylor was suddenly brave. The presence of these two examples of abject inactivity made him a superior being. He was a member of the ruling race. He was everything that, with such lying bravado, he had always said he was. He was a man of action. His eyes returned to the muzzle of Qasai's pistol.

He sprang at Qasai. His hands leaped to the Punjabi's throat. Qasai's gun discharged a clap of heavy thunder that filled the underground chamber with a thousand roaring echoes.

The detonation revived Shivajee Bannerjee in a spasm of terror. He sat up, his four chins trembling. Bounding miraculously to his feet, he set off in mad, blind flight, screaming wildly. He charged frantically across the room. His catapulting two hundred and eighty pounds hurtled directly into William Johns, bowling him over on top of the Pathan. His momentum unchecked, he veered crazily in a circle, still shrieking.

Taylor and Qasai were struggling on the floor of beaten earth. Taylor's legs were squeezed in a scissors hold on the Punjabi's gun hand. His two hands grasped the Butcher's beard, knocking his head against the ground. Qasai's left hand covered Taylor's face, the bony fingers feeling for an eye. The writhing pair turned over once, twice . . .

Again the gun exploded.

Shivajee Bannerjee, on his fourth insane circuit of the room, halted and almost stumbled as his knees flexed. His eyes bulged as they beheld the smoking muzzle of the pistol protruding from between Taylor's knees, apparently pointed straight at him, Babu Shivajee Bannerjee.

With a tenor wail that surpassed all his previous efforts, he jumped, landed on Taylor's back. He began kicking furiously. His first kicks struck indiscriminately. One caught Taylor under the eye. Then, as the babu's frenzy of feet continued unabated, the blows were localized. The kicks sought out Qasai's head, hit it again and again as if it were a football.

Taylor suddenly felt his adversary grow limp. He got up, snatched the

gun from unresisting fingers and leaped to the assistance of William Johns, who was wrestling with the Pathan for possession of the Pathan's knife. A well aimed blow above the ear with the barrel of Qasai's pistol stilled the Pathan.

One of the guards was outside the locked door, pounding on the panels, shouting—

"Kya hai?"

William Johns, on his feet, smoothed out his white mess jacket which was spattered with blood from a cut in his shoulder and the palm of one hand. He was once more the *burra sahib.*

"Babu," he directed, "tell that man to call down the other chap that's guarding the head of the stairs, and then he's to come in. Give me that gun, Arsenic. We'll knock them over one at a time."

"I'll knock 'em over, Bill," said Taylor.

"You're not tall enough, Arsenic," said Johns. "Hand it here."

"What's this argument, not tall enough?" protested Taylor, as he obediently handed over the gun. "Didn't I do for these other chaps?"

But Johns was not listening. He had unbolted the door. A minute later two more senseless Orientals were stretched on the floor.

"Come here, babu," said Johns. "Give us a hand tying up these men here."

Shivajee Bannerjee was sitting on the floor, popeyed and panting, fanning himself with one of Qasai's green slippers.

"Am asking excusal, sar," he gasped. "Greatly fear am somewhat ill and nervous. Sight of bleeding causes slight revolt of stomach. Also asking excusal for spectacle of uncontrolled temper just now, sar. I was possessed of deliriums and became overexcited. Am non-violent person at heart, sar—" He looked up with a weary smile.

"Nice little set-to we had just now," Arsenic Taylor said to William Johns, as he knotted a rope about the ankles of Qasai the Butcher. "But it wasn't much compared to a go I had in Sumatra last year with three Achinese. Huge strappin' blokes they were, and gone amuck, all three of 'em. I—"

"Tell me later when we're going home in the *ghari,* will you, Arsenic?" said William Johns with a grin.

Jinxes under the Big Tops

By FRANCIS BEVERLY KELLEY

THE big show was in Philadelphia. Drum crescendos filled the billowing Big Top as an acrobat poised atop a high pole, preparing for the hazardous headslide down a taut wire. Just as he touched his head to the slender silver thread on which he risked his life twice a day, the wire snapped with a sickening, singing sound and the performer was hurtled into space. When they picked him up, he had a broken neck. He died two days later in a local hospital.

The nomadic community of sawdust and spangles was grief-stricken at the demise of this lad who had been well liked among his fellow troupers, but there was an undercurrent of talk that transcended even this note of grief. This was the second accident within a week. During an evening performance a few days before, a trained horse had stumbled over a guy wire at the end of the hippodrome track and fallen into the unreserved seat section. Several spectators had been injured, one seriously. Many circus people believe that accidents come in threes. The death of the young acrobat made two.

"Who will be next?" the troupers asked themselves.

The question was settled a week later in Harrisburg when a nervy young woman had her back broken in a fall

from a horse during a jump over a high hurdle.

Sometimes Old Man Jinx seems to follow a circus during an entire season. One of the larger circuses had an experience of this sort in 1928. It pitched its tents late in April in an Indiana city and rehearsed several days prior to the advertised opening of the season. The night before the opening a river overflowed its banks and covered the show grounds with four feet of water. The circus labored feverishly to drag itself out of the clutches of the mire. There was danger of the animals' catching cold and developing pneumonia—a not uncommon ailment among monkeys and big cats. Finally, after several days, the show dragged itself on to the next town without giving a single performance in the city scheduled for the opening of the season.

A month later the same circus encountered nine straight days of rain in Canada, losing several matinée performances because of the inability of the workmen to get the show up on time despite herculean efforts. Canvas triples its weight when wet, and the John Robinson canvas — tons of it — was packed up wet every night for nearly two weeks.

On the heels of the deluge came the Bangor, Maine, date. At the evening performance Mabel Stark, world-famous trainer of tigers, was attacked by two of her striped charges, which put her in a hospital for six weeks.

A few weeks later the show lost one of its giraffes. The giraffe has no vocal cords and makes no sound. It is difficult to know when this creature is sick. Also, the giraffe is so delicate that he's the only animal on which the foreign exporter will not guarantee delivery. Throat and lung trouble frequently threaten the circus giraffe despite the fact that he is treated like a baby, travels in a specially padded and ventilated wagon and receives special diet.

The Robinson show lost its second giraffe during the same season. They were worth $10,000 apiece. In a Pennsylvania city three lions escaped during a matinée performance, but were recaptured without the spectators' knowing that anything was amiss.

Probably circus people are not as superstitious as their cousins of the theater, but there are a number of interesting so-called jinxes that are part and parcel of the world of the Big Tops. It is thought to be bad luck to leave a hat on a bed. The circus band does not play "Home, Sweet Home" until the closing performance at the end of a season. To render this number before that last performance is to court disaster and an early closing. A filled tent at the first performance of a season is supposed to be a good omen, although there is a European circus owner who believes the opposite. It is bad luck to whistle in the dressing tent, according to a number of troupers. This is a superstition that prevails in theater dressing rooms. Whistling is banned in newspaper offices as well.

Many attach significance to the date on which the late Lillian Leitzel, circusdom's queen of the air, fell to her death during a Winter circus in Copenhagen, Denmark, a little over two years ago. The little aerialist was executing her difficult routine high above the heads of the spectators when a part of her trapeze rigging gave way and plunged her to the floor of the auditorium. The fall occurred on Friday the 13th.

A number of prominent circus personalities have individual superstitions. Merle Evans, leader of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus band, will not let his musicians play "Light Cavalry". Evans's band rendered this overture on two occasions while with the 101 Ranch show several years ago and train wrecks followed in each case. On another occasion a clarinet player died immediately after "Light Cavalry" was played. So the number is taboo with the Ringling-Barnum bandmaster henceforth.

Mabel Stark dislikes having a cross-eyed tiger in her group of trained Bengals. Cross-eyed wild animals are supposed to be bad luck, but there is a reason for this. In the case of the big cats, crossed eyes often denote inbreeding and subsequent weaknesses that make a beast stubborn, intelligent and frequently very dangerous.

Mrs. Con Colleano, wife of the world's

foremost tight-wire performer, has an aversion to Tosti's "Goodby Forever" as a result of the following incident: Colleano was appearing on a vaudeville program several years ago and was spotted to follow the overture, which happened to be Tosti's "Goodby". During that performance Colleano's wire snapped and whipped his leg like a slashing saber. He was out of the act for a week. Mrs. Colleano isn't too sure the overture wasn't a presage.

Many years ago a show owner encountered bad luck throughout an entire season and finally laid the blame to a cross-eyed candy butcher whom he had employed without noticing the man's affliction.

Another owner of a small wagon show could not account for a run of ill fortune because all his wagons bore Scriptural mottoes. Finally he fired a peg-legged cook, and business picked up immediately.

Present-day circus performers often carry lucky charms to ward off bad fortune.

Buck Baker, well known clown of the Ringling show, carries a horseshoe made from a piece of shrapnel taken out of his leg during the World War. Vera Bruce Codona, aerialist, slips a four-leaf clover into her shoe before each performance; and Mary Linnet, equestrienne, rubs her saddle with a rabbit's paw prior to her act in the Big Top. Lucita Leers, aerialist, carries a sprig of Edelweiss during her performances. It is pressed and faded now, but she keeps it because she found it in a wooded section of her native Switzerland one day when she was lost.

By far the most interesting good-luck piece in circusdom belongs to young Karl Wallenda who, with his brothers and a sister, makes countless thousands catch their breath during the sensational Wallenda high-wire act performed in the dome of the Ringling-Barnum Big Top.

During the night show in Akron, Ohio, two years ago, the Wallendas were doing their famous three-high pyramid on the wire when a wagon outside the tent caught a wheel in the stakes to which the Wallenda cable was guyed out. The wire's movement was scarcely perceptible to the spectators, but it felt like an earthquake to the three boys and their sister perched atop it. The human pyramid collapsed, two of the boys catching the cable with hands and legs. Karl, the third young man, had managed to catch it with both hands when Helen, who was the top-mounter in the pyramid, fell past him. He swung out, as if from a trapeze bar, and caught the girl between his legs. All escaped injury.

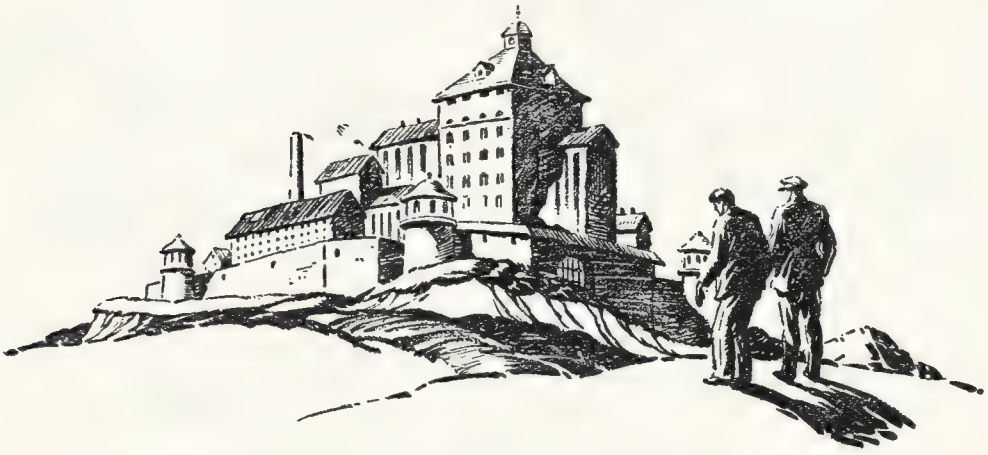
Karl Wallenda attributes their narrow escape to a ring which he wears on his left hand. It is a clear white stone mounted in a plain silver ring. When held to the light it is seen to contain a tiny figure of a man balancing on a wire, pole and all. A famous high-wire artist gave the ring to young Wallenda with instructions to pass it along to another famous performer when he, Karl, should retire from the circus. Wallenda frankly admits that he would be frightened if he were required to do his work without the ring.

It is not surprising that circus people, risking their lives twice a day in all kinds of weather, should have their pet superstitions. Rather is it remarkable that there are so few superstitions among the nomads of circusdom. In conversation they may declare profound belief in superstitions or in so-called lucky charms to stave off danger. But, when faced with supreme hazard, these stout troupers invariably neglect all superstitions and ill omens in their zeal to conform to the time honored slogan of the circus: "The show goes on."

Please see Camp-fire this issue for an important announcement

By the Author of "Deadline at Dawn"

HENRY LaCOSSITT



Holy Judd

IT WAS the year Adrian Marsh, district attorney for Matamoras County, ran against Garret Mack for Governor. It looked as if Marsh were sure to win.

Naturally, the convicts were interested. Many of them came from Matamoras County; therefore they hated Adrian Marsh. It seemed to them—and to most other people, for that matter—that he had been an unnecessarily harsh prosecutor in trying to create that impressive record of his. And lately he'd been making speeches advocating more rigid prison conditions. Also there were rumors about him and their fellow-inmate, Jim Judd.

And then, about a week before the polls opened, old Jim Judd was sentenced to the hole. Though at the time no one saw any connection between that surprising event and the impending election . . .

To get into the hole, you had to commit an offense, but that wasn't so hard to do. For instance, if you became desperately cold in your shiny new cell and if the dank chill of the block ate achingly into your condemned bones, you probably built a fire in your washbasin, and the fire probably cracked the basin. That would get you in the hole, all right. That was destruction of State property.

"Wanton," the warden would add in sentencing you.

Or, if that guard, Sully, or the P.K, Shackett, both stir-minded, got too tough and you led with your right, you'd be off to the hole before you knew it. That was assault.

"Vicious," the warden would add.

It was relatively easy.

The hole was a dungeon.

In a little knoll in the middle of the prison grounds a tunnel had been dug back for about twenty-five feet, ending in a concrete wall. On either side of this tunnel, which was paved with concrete, were eight heavy iron doors. These doors gave on arched cells lined entirely with concrete. If you were of average size you could stand comfortably beneath the center of the arch; but

move a foot or two to right or left and you bumped your worthless head. If you wanted to sit down you had to sit on the floor, and at night—could you tell it was night—you tucked yourself into a straw tick and dreamed of the Biltmore.

Twice a day a little grille at the bottom of the iron door was shoved back and the skinny hand of the guard set within a quart of water and a quarter loaf of bread—stale. You ate it and liked it. On Sundays, if—heaven help your felonious soul!—you came to spend a week, you got three of these meals.

The iron doors were perforated in two lines of little round openings, one line a foot from the top, the other a foot from the bottom, and you could and did amuse yourself by seeing how far your little finger would stick through. Through these openings a little—precious little—light would sift occasionally if the sun were shining outside. And by placing your mouth against them you could converse with your neighbors if you shouted long enough. And all the time you could hear the incessant whir of the ventilator fan set in the steel above the barred door of the tunnel, and at times you felt you must go mad if it didn't stop. Sometimes you did.

Therefore, because the hole was what it was, you avoided it if you could. And therefore, because it was for the worst incorrigibles in the prison, it was a big surprise when the warden sentenced Judd to its chill darkness for thirty days.

Judd? Why Judd was the model guy and a good guy, too, even if he was model. Judd had been in the Big House for three years and had a stretch of a couple more to serve, but he probably would be paroled before then. He was a setup for parole. The prison officials sent him on errands into the town nearby; the people living near the prison knew him and liked him; the warden and the prison board dusted him off and put him in the window when columnists and crusaders and all the others of the clamorous army of reformers came around to see if they kept your nose clean.

On such occasions Judd would talk gravely to the visitors, who would go away saying that there, now, was a man who had been helped by prison. It made you laugh, but you couldn't help liking Judd anyway; he was so regular. He divided his time between the warden's office, where he was a stenographer and looked after the office supplies, and the flower garden, in which he loved to work.

He'd always been regular, even though once he'd been D.A. down in Matamoras County, himself, and although a number of prisoners had come by their present address because of him. Even so, it didn't seem as if you could hold it against him. He'd been square through it all. Yet he'd been sent up for malfeasance.

He was a tall, powerful man in his forties, with grave, ocean-gray eyes. He had iron-gray hair and a craggy face and a mouth that looked as if it said little, a close mouth, but withal one that understood humor. His forehead was broad and there was a full inch and a half between the peaceful, deepset eyes that were shaded by great, bushy brows. His hands were large and capable.

Judd sprang his surprise on a desolate day in November when clouds hung low over the barren brown hills back of the prison and the sea moaned as it washed against the thick, castle-like walls on the other side. A little rain, part fog from the bay, was falling as you went about your business, and Judd, clad in his yellow slicker and sou'wester, was in the flowerbeds.

He was working there all alone, silent and solitary in the gray drizzle, when Shackett came along. You never were sure of the reason for it, for Shackett just came up and said something to Judd, and Judd pulled back, doubled up a big fist and let fly. Shackett's jaw, you found out afterward, was broken in two places. He fell down in the flowers, blood bubbling from his mouth, and lay there. And not until three hours later in the prison hospital did he come out of it.

MEANWHILE Judd had been hailed before the warden. The warden was shocked and said so. He was hurt and said so. And why in the name of heaven had Judd done such a thing?

"Because," said Judd quietly, but looking at the warden with a curious glint that had appeared in his eyes of late, "he got on my nerves."

The warden stared. He was silent a long time. Judd's eyes left the warden's face, drifted casually to a newspaper lying on the warden's desk. There was a story in the newspaper that he knew by heart, for he had read it in an afternoon issue the day before at the office, but his seemingly casual eyes went over it again swiftly. The glint in his eyes grew brighter as they focused on it:

> Adrian Marsh, candidate for Governor announced today that he would answe Thursday night at Delaclara the charge of his opponent, Garret Mack, who declared that Marsh had held stock in the defunct Matamoras Development Company under an assumed name. Marsh denounced Mack's statement as an outrageous falsehood and hinted at legal action.
>
> The Matamoras Company failed last year under suspicious circumstances after selling a million acres of desert land to people all over the United States. With the purchase of the land went a guarantee that water would be supplied free. After the failure of the company it developed that this pledge had no basis in fact.
>
> The sale of the land subsequently was proved to have been a gigantic swindle.
>
> Mr. Marsh is resting at Delaclara now at the home of his manager. While there, he intends to look at the prison . . .

Judd looked back at the warden, who seemed puzzled. Had Judd anything further to say for himself? Judd hadn't.

So off he went. And because they were still so astonished, they forgot to search him.

Sully took him, Sully with his crafty eyes and his sawed-off, lead-loaded billiard cue. Said Sully, the stir-minded:

"You ain't got no brains, old Holy Judd. Although I'd like to take a poke at the snake myself, you ain't got no brains. I'm glad he got it, though. Not that I give a damn about you, jailbird, but I'm glad he got it."

Judd looked at the guard. Sully was about his size, but he lacked Judd's cleanness.

"No, no sense at all. But you broke his jaw— Now you got to lie there thirty days, ain't you? That's good. That'll learn you, old Holy Judd. Maybe—" Sully's eyes gleamed—"I can make it easier, Holy Judd."

They were at the barred door of the tunnel. Judd's eyes swept up, met the crafty ones of the guard. Sully, as if he had said nothing, was unlocking the barred door. They stepped within. The guard unlocked one of the great iron doors. Judd reached in his pocket and drew something from it. He handed it to the guard. Sully's skinny hand reached out and took it. In the gloom of the tunnel he saw a two-dollar bill. At sight of it his crafty eyes widened, for convicts never had money like that. It was against the rules. Nevertheless, he did not question it. Judd always had seemed to be well provided. He put it in his pocket, then opened the door.

"I hope you like it," he whispered, and cocked an ear to listen to the vague murmuring that came from the other doors. "You ain't got no brains, Holy Judd."

But Sully was wrong. Judd was perhaps the only man in the history of that prison who had purposely got himself sentenced to the hole.

THREE years rolled back; four—and Judd was prosperous and influential. He was district attorney of Matamoras County and mentioned prominently for the Governorship, for he was collecting evidence against the biggest criminal ring the county or the State ever had known. The papers called it the Vice Ring. If he broke it he was assured of the Governorship. And he was about to break it. He was near the end of his investigations, close to those who controlled the ring.

He could remember the thrill of anticipation of those days.

Then came the trip to the hotel for dinner. A politician, a prominent official, he was a celebrity. Men and women flocked to speak to him—a prizefighter, an actress, a financier, an emiment author, a racketeer. The racketeer had come to his table and talked to him. Judd had permitted that; in his capacity as vice investigator, he talked to every one, even to powers in the underworld. Therefore, some of his enemies whispered things about him. It was rumored that Judd, because of his associates,

was not all that he should be; but those who knew him were sure that a dishonest cent never had found its way to his pocket.

When dinner was over he had risen to leave the dining room, a cynosure, for people spoke of him as the next Governor. As he approached the racketeer's table he noticed that the man had several companions. As Judd passed the table, the man rose, whispered something to him, handed him an envelop.

"You can use that," said the racketeer softly, "in that Vice Ring business."

Judd nodded his thanks and pocketed the envelop.

He was indicted and tried for accepting a bribe.

The evidence was clear. The racketeer's companions declared they had come along to see their boss make good a boast that he could fix the district attorney. They swore the envelop contained money. Hadn't they given their boss the money themselves? They had. He had declared he could arrange protection for their petty racket with the district attorney. When, after that, the district attorney made an overt move against them, it infuriated them. They went to the grand jury, along with their boss, and, being promised immunity, stated their case. They were out to get the D.A.

Other witnesses—the financier, the author, the actress, the prizefighter—declared they had seen the racketeer in conversation with Judd. They testified they had seen the racketeer hand him the envelop.

The evidence was more than clear, it was damning, for the rumors of Judd's misdeeds rose up to smite him now. People recalled the stories of his dark associations, without recalling the obvious reasons for them.

But that was not all. The State, searching for a special prosecutor, appointed Judd's former law partner, a man whom Judd had raised to prominence and befriended. The former partner had accepted.

The trial was dramatic. The special prosecutor, regardless of long association with the accused, hammered the case vigorously. He was, he said, torn; but his duty was clear. He was, he said, the friend of the accused; but however innocent he, the prosecutor, would always hold the accused, Judd was guilty before the law, and that was all he could ethically and morally consider. In an impassioned speech and with tears of emotion in his eyes, he dismissed Judd's declaration that the whole business was a frameup and asked for conviction.

He got it.

The racketeer and his men left town.

But things work out. Judd's friend and former law partner had profited by the case. He had risen. His name was Adrian Marsh.

STANDING in the blackness of his cell, Judd laughed.

"Hey, there!"

Above the whir of the ventilator the voice came faintly through the perforations of Judd's door.

"Who's the new guy?"

"Yeah," said another voice, "don't be so damned exclusive!"

"I'm Judd."

"Good Lord! Old Holy Judd."

There was a faint laugh.

"What you in the hole for, Judd?"

"I hit Shackett."

"Shackett! Judas Priest, the old D.A. poked the P.K."

"I hope it was a good punch, Judd."

"I broke his jaw in two places, they said."

"Broke his jaw?"

Silence for a moment, then laughter again.

"Judd, old crook, shake hands!"

There was a pounding on the iron doors. Judd pounded too.

"Glad to know you," he called. "Who're you?"

"Me? You don't know me, Judd. You never seen me. Guess you never seen none of us condemned rats. Anybody here clubby with old Holy Judd?"

No answer.

"Meet me," shouted a voice, "meet my offense. I'm Misappropriation."

"An' me," said another. "I'm Murder. I done the big job an' took the long rap. I beat the rope, but the 'cutor flung the book at me."

"An' me," said another, "I'm Highway Robbery. I showed a gun to people an' they flapped me caravans. But one day

they was a bloke who went an' told a harness bull, an' the harness bull went an' told the D.A, an' the D.A. sent me up the river on a cruise for a nice long rest, the motherless hound!"

Again the laughter. Judd waited expectantly, eagerly, perspiration starting on his forehead. But there was silence.

"Isn't there any one else?" he asked finally.

"Sure," said a voice — Murder's. "They's a bloke in the hole more exclusive than you are out of it, Judd. He's Manslaughter."

"Ah," said Judd softly. Then, "Where is he?"

"The fourth on the right as you come in, Judd. Why?"

"I—I—just wondered."

"Yeah?" said Murder. "Listen, Holy Judd, you was 'cutor onct; tell me somethin'. Manslaughter does the big job an' takes the soft rap. I do it an' take the long one. How does that come, Judd?"

Judd gritted his teeth in irritation.

"I don't know!" he said.

"I'll say you don't!"

"Hello, Mr. Judd."

Judd, standing by the iron door, started. He'd been expecting that voice.

"Hello, Ganelli," he said. "I heard up front that you'd been shifted. I was coming over to talk to you again."

"Ho-ho!" That was Murder. "So they is somebody knows you, huh, Judd? Well, tell your buddy he oughtn't to take the hole so hard, Judd. He don't seem to like it."

"Buck up, Ganelli!" shouted Judd. "What do you want, room service?"

Again the burst of laughter.

THE invisible seconds, ticking in the minds of the men there in the darkness as surely as a desk clock once had ticked in Judd's office, counted twenty-four hours. The men behind the iron doors knew that. You get that way in stir. You get to be a walking chronometer. Your despised head goes round clockwise, a coil of concentric circles, the outer circle being your stretch. Then come mere years, months, weeks, days, hours, minutes, seconds. Some of you can tell to the split second how long you've been there.

Judd could. So he made ready. His whole vast being grew taut as the steady *tick-tick* ate away the day. *Whir!* went the fan; *tick-tick!* went Judd's mind. His hands were moist as they gripped an object in his pocket. It was a large clasp-knife. His possession of it never had been questioned, for he used it in the flower beds. The grip became positively painful as he heard the harsh creak of steel when the ponderous key opened the barred door and the door swung open. He drew out the knife, but did not open it. He crouched in the darkness against the arched concrete, the curve of his back following the curve of the cell. He heard, as if his eardrums had been the exposed terminals of throbbing nerves, the guard's step. He watched, breathlessly, the grate in the base of the door. Presently it slid back.

A skinny hand reached in, set down a quart of water, a quarter loaf of stale bread.

"Sully!"

"What you want, Judd?"

"You can make it easier now, Sully."

"When I'm through with the others."

Judd counted off the sliding of other grates. Once more Sully was without the door.

"What you want?"

"Sully, come in. I'm sick. I want whisky."

"Whisky?" Sully chuckled softly. His key was harsh in the lock of Judd's door. The door swung open slowly. "You ain't got no brains, Holy Judd, but I guess I can get—"

Judd shot out of the darkness toward the guard and struck with the closed knife. Sully fell heavily within the cell. Not five minutes later a man in the uniform of a guard stepped from the cell, closed the door, locked it. He paused, but heard no sound; he laughed softly, his eyes shining strangely. In a holster at his hip was a .38 revolver and in his hand was Sully's loaded cue.

Swiftly he stole down the tunnel to the fourth door on the right.

"Ganelli!"

There was a stir within, cautious, suspicious.

"Ganelli!"

"What you want?"

Judd opened the door.

"Come out, Ganelli."

The man within, recognizing in the gloom the cap and uniform of a guard, came out.

"Come along," said Judd.

Silently they went to the barred door, opened it, stepped out into the November drizzle. From the brown mountains a sullen wind blew out to sea. It sent the misty rain scurrying in gusts, blurring the lights of the prison which had been turned on in the preternatural night.

Through the gloomy rain Judd led the man beside him across the flowerbeds and the yard to the big gate. Approaching this, Judd pulled down the brim of Sully's cap. He turned up the collar of Sully's slicker, muffling his face.

"Where we goin'?" asked Ganelli.

But Judd did not answer. He merely grabbed the man roughly by the arm; then, unlocking the door in the gate, stepped through.

They came into the glow of an arc light. On either side of the gate sat guards. A trusty or two lounged nearby. From the sea, suddenly close, came gusts of spray and wind and the sound of the waves lashing at the base of the great gray wall. Judd immediately inclined his head against the spray and wind. So did Ganelli.

"Where to?" asked a guard casually.

"The office," said Judd. His voice was barely audible, muffled in the slicker and striving against the wind and the sea.

The guard nodded. Judd and Ganelli passed on, away from the light, into the inky blackness of the outer yard.

"Where we goin', did you say?"

But again Judd only quickened his step and jerked his charge along.

Ahead a tiny light gleamed in the darkness. It was the little shelter-house at the entrance gate where sat a guard who registered every one who came in or out. He was equipped with automatic rifle and pistols to prevent either suspicious ingress or egress. Judd knew him.

"Jaccard!"

The guard in the house poked his head through the door.

"Who is it?"

"Come here!"

Jaccard saw the guard's cap, the thin, dark outline of the billiard cue. He came closer.

Judd hit him in the head with the cue.

"Oh!"

Snarling strangely, Judd turned on Ganelli, whose eyes widened as he recognized his companion.

"Mr. Judd—"

Judd clapped a hand over Ganelli's mouth. He made Ganelli help carry Jaccard away from the gate. They propped the guard against the prison wall, where Judd felt his heart. It beat normally. Then, jerking Ganelli with him, he passed through the gate.

The road there ran along the beach, houses on one side, the water on the other. They walked more swiftly now.

"What you doin', Mr. Judd?" asked Ganelli fearfully.

"I've broken jail and taken you with me."

Ganelli would have stopped in surprise, but Judd jerked him on.

"Why—Chees, Mr. Judd, that's swell. I—why, Judas Priest, Mr. Judd, you—what you doin' it for?"

Judd smiled.

"You'll find out," he said.

THE road ran away from the water. Judd steered Ganelli into a patch of trees. Stumbling, they made their way through wet and rotting leaves, through barren undergrowth, until they came out on a strip of beach by the bay. Nearby stood a shack.

Judd made for it. Across the bay they could see the city, lights winking through the gloom, and they slowed. The lights looked warm; the sight of them was lulling. But Judd jerked on.

A tree stood near the shack.

"Put your arms around it," said Judd.

"Why?"

"I said so—that's why!"

Ganelli, wondering, put his arms around the tree. Judd whipped out Sully's gun and a pair of handcuffs and locked Ganelli to the tree.

"Mr. Judd!" cried Ganelli. "What you—"

"Quiet!"

"But, Mr. Judd—" Ganelli's voice was

tremulous with panic—"you don't hold what I done against me, do you? I told you myself. You ain't gonna—"

"One chirp!" said Judd ominously. "Just one! We're not in court now, Ganelli. One chirp—" he waved his gun—"and out you go!"

He dropped the cue, disappeared back into the woods, running. At the road he hesitated; then, seeing it was clear, he hurried across it. On the other side he darted between two houses. One of these houses he knew well. It belonged to a famous State politician. Before he had been sent to prison Judd had been at that house many times. Since he had been in prison he had been there many times; he went there on important matters for the warden.

He peered cautiously through the window and saw two men sitting before a crackling fire. They were talking leisurely, smoking, sipping coffee and liqueurs. Judd's face twisted in bitterness. He hurried around the house to the cellar door and entered. Making his way cautiously, with Sully's torch to guide him, he came to the stairway. Nearby, an oil furnace hummed. Its warmth tempted him, but he ascended the stairs. At their head he opened a door slowly, peered out into a darkened hallway, then stepped through. From the living room close by he could hear the rumble of masculine voices. For a moment he listened, then smiled grimly.

"Have a whisky before you go?" he heard one of them ask. "It'll do you good."

There was an affirmative rumble from the other. Judd heard the host rise.

"I'll mix it myself. Thursday night. All the servants gone."

Judd smiled again. He had known all the servants would be gone. He drew farther back into the shadows of the hallway. A moment later the host came out of the living room, walked down the hall and disappeared through a door at the end. He was going to the kitchen. Judd left his hiding place immediately, tiptoed rapidly to the living room entrance, his gun leveled.

The man seated before the fire did not see Judd at once. He was a man about Judd's age, distinguished in appearance, but with a hard, crafty look about his blue eyes and his mouth that somewhat marred his looks. He was staring into the fire. But suddenly he became aware of the figure in the entrance. He glanced up, started. Judd, his gray eyes widened in an unnatural stare, beckoned with Sully's automatic. The man rose, trembling, and came out into the hall. Judd opened the cellar door quickly, thrust him through and followed him. He closed the door. The automatic was hard against the other's spine.

"Quiet!" whispered Judd.

He threw the torch ahead of them and, with the gun against the man's back, they descended the stairs silently. He urged his captive toward the cellar door.

"Jim!" said the man, but the pressure of the gun lowered his voice. "For God's sake, Jim, what are you going to do?"

Judd pushed him to the door and up the flight of stone steps to the back yard. As they went out they heard the steps of the host above as he came back into the living room. Judd grabbed his captive's arm, thrust the gun against his side and walked rapidly around the house to the road.

"Jim!" said the man again. He was panicky. "Jim—"

Since the road was clear again, Judd ran his captive across and into the trees.

"I just want to talk to you," he said.

He hurried his captive through the woods to the shack, where Ganelli stood manacled to the tree. Judd drew the guard's keys from his pocket and unlocked Ganelli. Ganelli rubbed his wrists, peering at the newcomer. The newcomer peered at Ganelli. Cold rain sprinkled softly from the leaves as they stared.

"Mr. Marsh!" said Ganelli. It was a sort of gasp.

"O dear God!" cried Adrian Marsh.

He turned and would have run, but Judd tripped him. He fell face forward in the wet leaves. Judd reached down, jerked him to his feet. Adrian Marsh, candidate for Governor, stared in terror at his old partner.

Judd picked up the cue and handed it to Ganelli. He pointed to the shack.

"Beat the padlock off the door, Ganelli."

Ganelli beat it off.

"Now open the doors."

Ganelli opened them. Within was a small boat with an outboard motor. Judd turned to Adrian Marsh.

"This belongs to your manager," he said. "We're going to have a ride."

He beckoned them into the boat. Ganelli, wondering because of the handcuffs, but intent on escape, obeyed with alacrity. Marsh hesitated, but Judd prodded him with the gun. He got into the boat. Judd took a pair of oars from a corner of the shack and handed one to Ganelli, one to Marsh.

"Jim!" said Marsh again. "Jim, I'm your old friend, your old partner; I—"

"Row!"

Marsh grew frenzied.

"You can't get away with this!"

"Row! Row until we're out far enough, then we'll use the motor."

Judd leveled his gun at Marsh.

THE little boat glided out into the bay, moving slowly. There was no sound except the whisper of the rain and the creak of the oars. When out more than half a mile Ganelli started the outboard. The boat bounded forward, gained speed.

The murky miles slid past as the night died and the morning hours began their climb. The lights of the city came closer, became fantastic festoons in the thick darkness. The three men watched the lights—Ganelli with a twisted smile of anticipation; Marsh with fear; Judd stonily. But abruptly they became alert. Far off across the waters the wailing scream of the prison siren sounded.

"Change your course, Ganelli," said Judd calmly.

They had been following a diagonal course across the bay. The bay was formed by two headlands which, like vast arms, seemed to reach for each other and only failed to touch by a mile or so. One of these headlands was narrow, the other wide. On the narrow one, about twelve miles from the end, stood the prison. One side of it faced the sea; the other the bay. On the other headland stood the city. The diagonal course had been directed at the point of the headland opposite the city, but at Judd's direction Ganelli headed for the open sea.

Half an hour later, with the shriek of the siren a thin wail far behind them, they passed beneath the cloudy beam of the outside light, slipped by the monstrous, spectral bulk of an inbound freighter and swung into open water, dipping and cresting a long groundswell. A mile or so out they changed again, headed northward up the coast, past the western face of the prison headland. As they changed, the engine coughed, whistled feebly, became silent.

Judd reached beneath a tarp which lay beside him and drew forth a five-gallon can. Ganelli poured two gallons into the little tank and they went on.

"Where'd you get that, Mr. Judd?" asked Ganelli.

"A tank in the shack. It's always full." He smiled into Marsh's stare.

By dawn, another gray dawn with the fine rain still falling, they were shuddering with cold. The bread and water of the hole had been scant nourishment for Judd and Ganelli; Marsh, unused to hardship, shook violently. His face and fingers were blue. His smart clothes, sodden and drooping, were small protection.

"Jim!" he sobbed. "Jim, I'm your friend. We were partners. I've sent you money, Jim. I've tried to make your sentence easier."

Judd smiled.

"The only time I used the money," he said, "was last night. I bribed a guard. The rest was distributed among the prisoners."

"But, Jim, what are you going to do? Oh Lord, I was to have made a speech last night! What will they think? Jim, don't you know I'm running for Governor?"

"Yes." Judd smiled again. "It's too bad," he said. "Maybe—" the smile grew broader—"they'll think you can't answer those charges of Mack's."

"Jim!" Marsh crawled toward him in the boat. "I'm going to be Governor. I'll pardon you. Think of our friendship. I didn't want to prosecute you, Jim. I didn't—"

"No?"

Marsh drew away, frightened by Judd's face. Suddenly he rose. Ganelli,

watching, cursed with fear.

"What are you going to do?" shrilled Marsh. "If you don't tell me I'll capsize—"

"Sit down!"

Slowly Judd brought Sully's gun up and aimed at Marsh's heart. Marsh stared at it. With something between a sob and a curse, he sat down.

The little boat bobbed on. As it rounded a point, the weary day wearing toward dusk, Judd told Ganelli to steer for the shore. They put in at a little cove between two jutting prows of rock. Ganelli jumped out and drew the craft ashore. As he did so, Marsh, with a cry, leaped from the boat and ran wildly along the beach. Judd ran after him. When almost on the man, he tripped him again, sent him flying headlong. Then grabbing Marsh's coat collar, he dragged the candidate for Governor back to the sheltered spot.

"Rustle up a fire, Ganelli," he said.

Ganelli scurried about. Under the jutting rock overhang he found dry wood. Judd gave him Sully's notebook for paper and the guard's matches. The fire blazed up in the shelter of the rock.

"Get warm, first," said Judd to Adrian Marsh.

Marsh moved dully to the fire and warmed his hands. Above the flames his haunted face was horrible to look upon, but Judd merely smiled. He said:

"You didn't count on Ganelli killing a man, did you? You never thought he'd be sent up for manslaughter in the prison I was in, did you? And you didn't think he would be resentful when you couldn't get him out of the mess, did you? But he was. Ganelli—" Judd leaned forward and glared across the fire at the leading candidate for Governor—"told me everything."

Adrian Marsh opened his mouth to speak, but he only moaned, tortured by cold and fear. His eyes darted hatred at Ganelli.

"Now," resumed Judd, "you're going to confess." He drew from the pockets of Sully's uniform a number of sheets of paper. There was typewriting on the sheets. "I've even written it out for you," he continued. "Incidentally, the sheets bear no letterhead, so the prison won't enter into it. They came from the warden's office. I handle the supplies there, you know. And I've even brought along an addressed envelop, which is stamped. I weighed it in the office."

Judd smiled. He drew out Sully's fountain pen.

"You can use this."

"What do you—what is it you want me to do?"

"Sign them. It's the whole story of the Vice Ring and my frameup."

Adrian Marsh started to his feet, eyes bulging.

"Damn you!" he screamed. "I'm the district attorney of Matamoras County! I'm going to be Governor. You can't threaten me! You can't—"

"I can do as I please."

"No! No you can't! Every one thinks you're guilty! That's past!"

"I can kill you now," said Judd softly, "or perhaps I can take you back to the prison and let the boys have a chance at you."

Adrian Marsh stared in terror.

"Ganelli," said Judd, "get that surfboard from the boat."

Ganelli fetched it. Judd handed Marsh the pen. In the shelter of the rock he read the sheets, glancing fearfully now and then at the grim and ruthless man above him and at the unwavering muzzle of the gun.

HE READ of how he had hired Ganelli to give Judd the note that night in the hotel and of how the note contained only a meaningless address; of how Ganelli's men were really sincere in believing the bribe to be within the envelop. He read of how he, as one of those who controlled the Vice Ring, frightened by the approach of Judd's investigations and knowing he could not sway Judd, had planned the business and, after the successful termination of the trial, had sent Ganelli away from the city.

He read of how his political ambition also had entered into it, of how he expected to be Governor, and of his jealousy of Judd. The sheets were addressed to the Chairman of the State Board of

Elections and the facts stated were given as his reason for resigning his candidacy for Governor and his post as district attorney. The statement was in the style of a confessional. At the end of the facts about the Vice Ring was another paragraph. This read:

> I am also guilty of fraud in the Matamoras Development Company crash, having held stock in the company and directed its operations.

Marsh started as he read that, then he shouted—

"Damn you! How did you know?"

Judd answered calmly—

"Did you ever hear of the prison grapevine? Now sign it!"

The man who had been leading candidate for Governor hesitated, but Judd brought the gun closer. Marsh signed. He began to moan again.

Judd ordered Marsh and Ganelli to change clothes. The politician obeyed listlessly; Ganelli eagerly made the change.

"It'll be sort of funny to see the D.A. in this outfit," he said. "An' I'll get along in this store suit a lot better'n in the suit the State had made for me." He laughed.

Judd nodded smilingly. He shortened the anchor chain by knotting it many times, then slipped the handcuffs through one of the knots and locked Marsh to the chain. The politician could not reach the engine and he could not move without dragging the boat with him.

"Now," said Judd, "we'll mail it." He put the sheets in the stamped, addressed envelop. "The capital's only a few hours from here. It will be there in the morning. Come on, Ganelli."

Ganelli, puzzled and tempted to refuse, looked at Judd and said in a belligerent tone—

"Why me?"

"I'd just rather have you along, that's all."

Ganelli smiled crookedly, looking at the revolver in Judd's hand.

"O.K," he said. "Pretty wise, ain't you, Mr. Judd?"

Judd smiled. They walked along the beach until the rocks ended. Then they struck inland. Not far from the sea they came in sight of the prison walls.

"Look there!" exclaimed Ganelli.

Judd nodded.

"Yes," he said. "A long way around the peninsula, but a short way across it. The boat's not more than a mile from the back of the prison."

They skirted the walls carefully, under cover of trees.

"Chees, Mr. Judd, ain't you worried comin' so close?"

"No. They'll be looking on the bay or over in the city now. They'll think we went that way. They rarely look close. And they probably know about the launch now."

"But how about Marsh?"

Judd shrugged.

"They won't know what to think about him—until tomorrow."

When they had rounded the prison, they entered the outskirts of the little town of Delaclara. Judd gave Ganelli the envelop and pointed to a mailbox down the street. Ganelli mailed the politician's confession while Judd remained in the shadow of the trees. Then they turned and went back the way they had come.

As they neared the beach Ganelli said—

"You couldn't of took him back to prison like you said, could you?"

"Certainly not, but he didn't like the prospect."

Ganelli shook his head.

"And how did you know about the Matamoras Development business?"

Judd laughed bitterly.

"I didn't."

"Well I be damned!" said Ganelli.

They reached the beach. For a moment Judd looked at the shuddering man who had been a powerful district attorney and leading candidate for Governor and who once had been his partner and friend. For a long moment of silence he mused, while the fine rain whispered in the surf and touched them with tiny, invisible fingers. But Marsh refused to meet his eyes.

Judd unlocked the handcuffs. He beckoned Marsh to the shelter of the rock and warmth of the fire which Ganelli had replenished.

"Now," he said, "all we have to do is wait—"

AT NOON next day Judd rose from his seat on a small rock. Both Ganelli and Marsh had slept fitfully under the overhang, but Judd hadn't closed his eyes.

"Now," he said, "you can change clothes again."

Ganelli frowned.

"Why should I do that?"

"I don't want him caught—if he is caught—in prison uniform."

"But how about me?"

"I'll take care of you."

Ganelli hesitated a moment, then shrugged. Once again he changed clothes with Marsh. Judd took off Sully's slicker and handed it to Marsh.

"You can go now," he said. "You're free, free as any fugitive can be. Make the most of it. You can have the boat."

Ganelli started.

"The boat! Why, Mr. Judd, we need it in our—"

"No, we don't" said Judd. "Show him how to start and stop it, Ganelli."

Ganelli showed him. Marsh got in. He donned the slicker and turned to Judd, his hard eyes flaming.

"By the Lord!" he said. "Do you know what I'm going to do? I'm going back and tell them it's a lie. I'll stretch your sentence! I'll tell them the whole story of this—this outrage! I'll—"

"No," interrupted Judd, "you won't do that. You know as well as I, no one would believe you. The statement's too thorough and authentic. They've read it by now. And besides, there are other people who know about it. You'd be ridiculous. You'd better go now."

Marsh seemed to sag. His face, gray with cold and fear, twitched with the emotions wracking him. Suddenly he started the engine, cut out into the water, disappeared in the fog.

"Say," said Ganelli, "who else knows of it besides us?"

"Nobody, except the people who've read it. Come on."

They walked up the beach in the same direction they had taken the night before. They turned inland at the same point.

Ganelli was puzzled.

"Where we goin'?" he asked.

"Back to prison."

Ganelli tried to jerk away from Judd, but Judd gripped his arm firmly. He held the gun in Ganelli's ribs.

"What the hell!" snarled the racketeer. "You mean— I won't, you lousy fink!"

Judd laughed.

"You've a sentence to serve," he said. "You killed a man, Ganelli. Besides—" Judd's laughter grew—"do you think I'd let you loose on society again?"

Ganelli walked in infuriated silence for awhile. Finally he growled—

"Then why'd you take me out?"

"Moral effect on Marsh, Ganelli. You were great, too."

THE invisible seconds had tolled off forty-eight hours to the men there in the hole. The guard had come with the evening meal. Conversation, which had burst out with that event, had died again, but they all became alert with the grinding of a ponderous key in the lock of the barred door. The barred door opened and closed. There were footsteps on the floor of the tunnel. Somebody was swearing horribly. Then there was another grinding of a key, the opening and closing of an iron door, the clang of a second iron door. Then silence, except for the muffled cursing.

"Who is it?"

"Judd!"

A short silence, then an explosive chorus—

"Judd?"

"Judas Priest, did they get you, Judd?"

"No, I came back."

Another silence, this time longer.

"Judd, you actually came back? What in—"

"What happened to your buddy, Judd?"

"He came back too."

There was another silence, then a single, disgusted voice:

"You surely ain't got no brains, old Holy Judd. He ain't either. Why, you was a setup for parole anyway, but you got away with your lam an' then come back. You surely ain't got no brains."

The muffled cursing continued. Judd, standing in the darkness of his cell, raised his eyes, from which the glint had disappeared. He chuckled.

"Well, maybe not," he said.

CHINA IS LIKE THAT

By JAMES W. BENNETT

ALL foreigners—or so the Chinese believe—have queer, squeamish ideas about the taking of bird life. Therefore, it was with expressions of great trepidation that my Peking neighbor sent me a note asking if I would object to his killing a magpie that made its home in my courtyard but which was bedeviling a nesting pigeon in his. I answered the missive in person, to assure the sender of my complete agreement with his plan. That same wretched magpie had killed one of a trio of fledgling doves trying to make a home in my oleanders; and only in the nick of time had I saved the two other doves from the same unhappy fate.

In addition, I was a little curious about my Chinese neighbor whom I had never met. I had heard that he was a self-made man who had lifted himself by his own efforts from the ranks of street pedlers to that of *compradore* of Peking's leading bank. He proved to be a huge man—fat, yet with a firm bearing that indicated solid muscles beneath.

After a word or so of polite greeting, he clapped his hands as a signal. A servant brought him a long polished bow and a silken quiver of steel tipped arrows. Overhead, in a willow tree that shaded his courtyard, the magpie chattered and scolded. With a grunt my neighbor strung the bow. The tension must have been powerful, for the cord whined. Then, pointing it quickly—even carelessly it seemed to me—he let fly an arrow. Transfixed, the murderous magpie fluttered down. I applauded his skill; but he only smiled.

"It is nothing," he said in a highly inflected English. "Once, as a young man, I was a dove seller. I made my living with a bow."

I must have looked exceedingly blank at this, for he went on:

"All dove sellers use bows—but never arrows—except, as today, against magpies or hawks. They shoot little pellets of lead fitted in a notch in the bowstring. A dove in the air is any man's property. They see a dove flying; they let loose the lead. They must learn to shoot so skilfully that the bird falls within reach. The shot must be only hard enough to stun the dove. Then they sell these captured birds as pets."

He ceased speaking and flexed the bowstring several times, as if testing his own muscles. Then he added:

"Sometimes a dove seller will sell one dove two or three times to the same purchaser. He will wait outside the owner's courtyard until the dove is released for an airing to stretch its wings. Then, with that pellet of lead, he will knock the pet bird from a tree into the road. Of course, the buyer recognizes his pet and ransoms it."

"Of course," I echoed dazedly.

Thanking the ex-dove seller for having rid us of the magpie menace, I went back to my own courtyard. There I carefully tied a string to the legs of each of those two doves I had managed to save from the spite of the magpie. It was a very short string. I was not at all certain that, in his leisure, this bank *compradore* might not get out his bow and a slug of lead, and renew his youth by trepanning my fledgling doves. Not at all certain. China is like that!

Concluding STRANGERS OF THE AMULET

By GORDON MacCREAGH

Author of "The Lost End of Nowhere"

The Story Thus Far:

KINGI BWANA chuckled to himself after his interview in Kisumu, East Africa, with Mr. Smythe, the London financier, who was interested in colonial mining projects. Mr. Smythe had just paid Kingi Bwana well to make a trip which Kingi Bwana had always wanted to make anyway. Indeed, he and his wise old friend, Yakoub ben Abrahm, the Jewish trader, had already planned their own expedition to the mysterious Sudan-Abyssinian border. Mr. Smythe stipulated that the safari be secret, the destination unannounced, which did not worry Kingi, whose destinations usually were his own private affairs.

However, in a settlement like Kisumu there are hangers-on whose suspicions are aroused by a safari organized by a wealthy man who does not accompany his own exploring party. Such hangers-on were Van Vliet, Dago Lopez and Johan, all of whom disliked Kingi Bwana. They found his reticence more than a little annoying.

Kingi Bwana and Yakoub decided to depart from Kisumu as inconspicuously as if they were on a one-day jaunt. Such a deceptive move was possible only because Kingi had two remarkable natives in his employ—Barounggo, a giant Masai; and Kaffa, a shrewd little Hottentot—who were capable of getting the porters started toward the jungle without the supervision of a white man. Barounggo and Kaffa secured fighting porters, or *askaris*, instead of the usual Shenzies, and very promptly the safari was off.

On the way to the unexplored borderland Kingi stopped to visit the aged Wizard of Elgon, who, guessing Kingi's errand, warned him that the country was already occupied by the People of the Amulet. Why intrude upon them? Besides, prophesied the Wizard:

"I see blood. White men will die!"

King muttered to Yakoub:

"Cheerful, isn't he? Well, if one of them's going to be me, there'll be others die too. Let's risk it, anyway."

So again they trudged toward the distant highlands. After a long trek Kingi discovered that another safari was trailing them. It soon became obvious that the other safari, consisting of Van Vliet, Dago Lopez and Johan, with twenty porters, was deliberately spying upon Kingi and Yakoub. Kingi warned the three white men not to follow

too closely. He and Yakoub proceeded. They met hostile tribesmen, but forced their way past them; making it difficult, however, for Van Vliet if his safari came the same way.

The trail led upward, seemingly a road to nowhere. When they halted while ascending the plateau, Kingi noticed that his little Hottentot, Kaffa, scrambled ahead like an inquisitive monkey, turning over stones to flush shiny brown lizards. Suddenly the Hottentot threw himself flat upon his face, knees doubled under him, head in the moist dirt, beating the ground with his hands and chattering a monosyllabic stream of prayer.

ALL that could be seen to occasion this performance was a mound of stones in the middle of the gully floor; an ancient cairn, moss grown and water worn, but distinguishable and obviously the work of human hands. King grinned.

"That's the only thing the little devil is afraid of. Heitsi Eibib, the Hottentot god of good luck and fertility and half a dozen other things, fought around and died a whole lot and was reincarnated again; and he is buried all over the landscape in inaccessible ravines under rock piles."

Yakoub nodded understandingly out of his knowledge of ancient things.

"Yes, yes, a very common belief. In Palestine in the hills overhanging Acre are such cairns. There is argument as to whether the Jews brought some heathen superstitions about the death of the Babylonian Baal out of the captivity or whether they are more recent."

The Hottentot assumed an incongruous command of the party. Very carefully he piloted the porters round the ancient cairn so that no profane foot should defile a single stone. When every man had passed safely he chose a smooth boulder and, crawling on his stomach, pushed it on to the pile.

"O Heitsi Eibib," he muttered, "give us fortune and plenty of cattle."

Barounggo, standing by in enormous solemnity, could understand that prayer; for the Masai, a herd-owning people, live, in curious anomaly to their bloodthirsty character, almost exclusively on dairy products.

He leaned over and with precise care spat upon the stone. At which the Hottentot, instead of becoming infuriated, clucked approval. He knew that such was the Masai equivalent of calling down the blessing of the high spirits.

After that he was full of enthusiasm and a strong confidence for anything that might come. When the road grew worse he scrambled ahead, calling loud encouragement to the porters, promising them all manner of good things—meat in plenty and corn, and milk to steep their corn and honey to sweeten it.

"Is that an omen?" Yakoub asked with less than his usual cynicism. "The promised land flowing with milk and honey?"

And King, engrossed, swearing, in keeping his rifle sights from getting bumped, opined as he clung to a root with one hand and swung his leg up to a ledge—

"If it's true that all good things are hard to get, this country will sure have to be good."

The climb became worse. Sheer cliff with a thin waterfall tumbling down the center barred the way. But Kaffa, climbing like a baboon, found a foothold to ledges yet higher. The rest scrambled up with the help of a rope. The packs were hauled up.

Enormous ferns made wet screens across the way so that it was impossible to know where the gorge twisted; and one fought through a wall of matted greenery to find one's face close up against a wall of slick, lichen-grown sandstone.

The steep sides began to open out, to slope away, giving promise of ending, only to break up into other dark gorges that crawled tortuously up and forever up.

A single compensation was the climate. The dead, dry heat of the plain was left far below. A warm, wet wind filtered down the slope. Honest green foliage was there. Things lived.

CAMP was made high on the side of a cliff like a swallow's nest. And for that the compensation was no *boma* and no lions. King ordered the Hottentot:

"Open up pack No. 6. The wind of the night blows chill. Let each man receive the blanket that was promised."

Which comfort, artfully given at just the right time, was one that only naked

men could properly appreciate.

The next steep, V-shaped gash in the far sky was really the last. Toiling through its boulder heaped bottom, they came suddenly through the last forest edge and there was no farther ridge.

The climbers saw before them a short half mile of treeless, wind blown, grassy slope. The last ridge through which they had come towered on to a jagged lipped crater from which, as if drawn with a pencil, a straight black wall of old lava cut across the green plain. Through the wall was a space where some last covulsion had obligingly split a gap; and beyond it nothing except white cloud against blue sky. This was over the top.

"Whew!" King mopped his brow and stood to survey the scene. "Looks like we've arrived. And—" his nose wrinkled to the cool wind and sniffed luxuriously; he nodded this way and that— "this is good country. Look, there's goats, and there's fat tail sheep. There'll be a village through that split in the wall. I'll admit to the world these people are sure hidden. Let's go."

As they crossed the grass land a small white figure detached itself from a grazing herd and ran swiftly through the gap in the lava wall. King snapped his glasses up to cover the runner.

"Hm, clothed in pants and a shawl. Something like the Abyssinian costume. These are no savages. Wonder whether they keep hidden behind the point of a spear? Keep going; I'd just as soon meet them in that defile as out in the open. There's a lot of diplomacy behind a solid front and no way to wiggle around."

But no resistance met them in the narrow passage. Like a rough hewn coal mine cut it diagonaled through the black lava. A fall of immense blocks at the end obstructed the view. King was cautious about turning into that narrow outlet. It was just the place for a spear or a club to be waiting.

But no weapon was there. King poked his head around the corner. All that met him was a magnificent, breath-taking scene.

A wide green valley opened up before him and sloped away to lose itself in a velvet haze. A silver ribbon crept down its middle. Other little ribbons joined it from the hills on either hand. A jumble of round brown roofs straggled across the foreground. Terraced fields, square bordered by irrigation ditches, showed yellow under corn, rufous under grass, speckled white under cotton.

A prosperous scene of peace and plenty. But King stretched his long arm and pointed out to Yakoub, not the huts or the fields or the scattered flocks, but a dirty smudge that marred the far distant landscape.

"The slope is too gentle for a landslide there," he whispered.

"And so what?" Yakoub caught at his arm.

"Diggings." King uttered the magic word.

A group of white clad figures was coming from the collection of huts. A deputation they seemed to be, for no sun flashed from spear points.

"Looks like peace all right," said King. "It's a sure rule. In good country you find good people, until somebody comes along and spoils them. Let's go on down."

The group of men, upon closer approach, were seen to be tall with dark, intelligent faces and keen black eyes; more Abyssinian in color and feature than African. And they greeted in Amharic:

"*Thena-yisth-al-enye*—may He give you health on my account."

Both King and Yakoub knew enough of that terribly involved language to understand and to know at the same time that these men spoke with a throatily aspirated accent. King, with apprehension, asked at once if they were Abyssinians; for a law of that country is that all minerals belong to the imperial government and may be mined only under jealously granted concessions that very often cost more to procure than ever comes out of the claim.

They lifted a leaden load from his mind by telling him that while they spoke a patois of Amharic, they were strangers. And that load was a gossamer thread compared with the weight

that lifted itself as King and Yakoub simultaneously nudged each other and pointed with their eyes to circular disks of red-yellow metal engraved with crude characters that each man wore suspended by a string at his throat.

The deputation with grave courtesy invited King and his safari to accept the hospitality of their village.

They had never seen white men; but they had heard rumors of them now and then from bold young men who went over the difficult mountain trails to trade with Abyssinia. White men, the rumor ran, were very wise and had all sorts of new and wonderful knowledge. Would the white visitors be their guests?

King looked at Yakoub, and Yakoub looked at King. This was beginning to be a fairy story; it was too good to be true. Courtesy and kindliness like this in Africa? Verily a promised land after their labors.

AS THEY walked on down the rich valley both men had the same horrid thought, and it burst from both of them simultaneously. A hideous thought that was quite unthinkable. Imagine these people in the hands of that Van Vliet gang with their gin-trading tactics! It was such traders who had ruined all of Africa.

In the village they were shown into a round hut with a thatched roof. Young men brought water in earthen bowls and—miracle—soft cotton cloths for towels. Presently a meal would be ready for them and the father of the village would eat with them and would learn knowledge from the white men.

That, said King, speaking for his group, would suit them exactly. They wanted to see the chief, or the king or whoever might have the say-so about things, and they hoped then to come to some agreement about a trade.

But they had no chiefs, these people; no king. The head of the family with its dependents was the headman of his village and also its priest; and the headmen all gathered in council from time to time under the headman of the big village fifteen miles down the valley.

Yakoub nodded in perfect agreement and understanding. Here was the pure patriarchal system perfectly adapted to an isolated people who had developed the arts of peace in their favorable environment rather than the arts of war. Truly these were an exceptional people to find hidden in almost the last lone little strip of Africa that hadn't been gobbled up by contending European powers. It would be a pity if they should fall in with the rest of Africa.

Suddenly Yakoub grabbed King by the arm. Enlightenment had burst upon him.

"I know what he meant. I see it now. The Wizard—it was a pity that we knew about them—these people hidden from what the conqueror races call the benefits of civilization."

King nodded agreement. He knew that section of history as well as Yakoub. There was a routine schedule —first missionaries and hymn books, then traders and gin, a fight, then soldiers and guns; and presently another section of the map was colored the same as the nearest adjacent section. True, it would be a pity. Still, how was a country to be exploited without the influx of white man's methods, his machinery, his capital, his brains?

The discussion was still going on when a young man came to say that the meal was ready. With quickening interest they followed him. The attitude of the patriarch would indicate much as to what sort of trade arrangement might be made about whatever it was that came out of those diggings. The young man led the way to a hut that was quite a building, though composed of the same materials as all the rest—a large, round, thatched structure of adobe surrounded by a court paved with flat stones which in turn was surrounded by a circular adobe wall.

They were about to turn into the open gateway when the young man, with a suddenly shocked expression, told them that that was the *Xjehaver-beth,* the tribal prayer house. The patriarch's modest house was next to it and was no different from all the others.

The patriarch himself was a venerable old man, white bearded like a high priest of some ancient cult. He greeted his guests with grave dignity at his door

and conducted them without any preliminary conversation through a short passage into the dim interior of his house. This room, like the outside, was circular and up through its center ran the single supporting pole of the whole roof structure. Doorways hung with white cotton cloth led into a series of cubicles between this inner and the outer wall.

Along an arc of the room wall was a built-in bench; before it, a curved plank table at which the members of the family already stood at their places—stalwart sons only, no women.

Both the guests realized that this meal was something in the nature of a ceremony; some sort of initiation before acceptance on a friendly basis. Silently they sat at the places given to them. Immediately two youths entered, one carrying a bowl of water, the other a towel.

The old man ceremoniously dipped his fingers, wiped them and muttered something in his beard. The youths came to Yakoub, who sat next. Abstractedly he went through the selfsame rite—dipped, wiped and muttered in his beard as of long familiarity.

Suddenly his eyes dilated. He looked round wildly, as if coming out of a dream. Then he gave a loud cry.

"But this is orthodox of my own people. The washing of hands. These people are—" He turned to the old man— "you are Falasha, the Strangers, of course. Why did I not guess it at once? *'Xjehaver-beth'*, the house of Jehovah. You are Jews!"

The old man smiled benignly and shook his head.

"Falasha we are, but we are alone. We have no people. A few of us there are in Abyssinia. From them we have also heard this rumor that there are more of our people in far countries. But that can not be. We are alone."

"But no. But listen! This is a miracle. Let me prove to you—how can I begin? Look, I know your rites and your ceremonies. I will tell you them all. I—"

The old man bowed to the torrent of excited speech. But he had to interrupt.

"First, you must break bread in my house. Afterward we can talk."

That was another rite; and Yakoub knew the ceremony of that one, too. Then his waves of words loosed themselves upon the wondering patriarch.

KING left them talking about things that he did not understand and went outside to weigh this new angle in his mind. He knew the story of the Abyssinian Falasha—one of the most stupendous and incredible dramas of all the world's nations. How a Hebrew scholar traveling in Abyssinia only a few years ago had suddenly came upon these "Strangers".

A few scattered groups of them, living among the Abyssinians, speaking their language, burnt by generations of sun and exposure to their color; but remaining rigidly exclusive units among themselves. Their ancient language was lost; only a few distorted words remained. They knew nothing about themselves, whence they had come or how; only that until the accession of the new emperor of the land they had been persecuted for the faith that they clung to with iron tenacity. Before that, a blank. But—this was the miracle—they had retained practically intact the forms and ceremonies of the religion they had brought with them, nobody could guess how many thousand years ago. And when the scholar told them the news of coreligionists all over the world they refused to believe the wonder.

Lack of communication in Abyssinia, absence of roads and appallingly difficult travel had delayed any serious investigation of them. The scholar had immediately dedicated his life to them and was engaged in collecting funds for their amelioration. And now here was this new outlying group, more isolated than any. The Hidden People.

King had heard theories. One savant traced in an ancient record hewn in stone that at the time of the captivity in Egypt a large band of Hebrews had escaped and fled up the Nile and eastward; the reigning Pharaoh had sent soldiers after them, none of whom ever came back. Another professor claimed that the caravans of Solomon came to Ethiopia to seek gold and took back the

vast riches that went to the building of the great temple.

Ever since those ancient days the story of gold in Ethiopia had persisted. And that brought King right down to the immediate present. Gold there was in Abyssinia, plenty of it. The hereditary prince of the Beni Shangul district in those western mountains paid a colossal tribute in links of beaten gold. If there was gold in these lost hills, what would be the attitude of these hidden people toward its exploitation?

And the more King thought about that and about all the ramifications of the matter—his partner Yakoub included—the less he liked it. His thin smile puckered his eyes as he looked out across the prosperous, peaceful valley. Exploitation—a gold strike. What would those things mean? King fell to whistling his long, mournful discords. Then he shrugged his misgivings from his big shoulders and lighted his pipe.

When King wanted to know more about the diggings down the hillside, they were evasive. When he asked about the engraved disks that they all wore at their necks, they did not understand.

"The root of all evil," King murmured to himself. "And they don't want it to attract any evil here. I wonder, I wonder. What did the old wizard of Elgon mean about doing the thing that is right?"

IT WAS not until evening that Yakoub came away from his conference with the patriarch, and at its conclusion they were both changed men. In the patriarch the change was easy to see and to tabulate. He went about as a man in a daze. Unbelievable things had been proven to him. A miracle in the shape of an untidy man had come from the almost legendary outside world and had blasted the traditions of generations. He was numb, he did not know yet whether from access of joy or from apprehension.

With Yakoub the emotion was not so easy to analyze. He was extraordinarily elated, at the same time vaguely troubled; full of zeal for what might be done with these people, and in the next moment apathetically hopeless against impending disaster. He himself did not know just what was in his mind.

The only definite information he had was that they were to go down the valley the next morning to the big village to be presented to the chief patriarch, the keeper of the amulet, who was learned in the ancient traditions and could adequately discuss these new wonders.

"Were you able to get anything out of the old man about the diggings?" asked King. "They froze up on me like clams when I tried them."

But that was a question that Yakoub had found no opportunity to intrude into the whole afternoon of discussion.

The little journey down the valley was a delightful Springtime hike in the country after the recent toil and sweat and eternal vigilance of safari. Here everything was so peaceful and secure that Barounggo and the porters were left behind to rest and feast after their labors. Only the little Hottentot trotted behind his master and chattered his comments upon the good country through which they passed.

And good country it was. The same rich soil as in the main Abyssinian plateau, the same all-year-round climate; so that crops grew and ripened, not according to season but according to time of planting and irrigation. Here the ripened grain and the new green shoots could be seen alongside of each other in adjacent fields.

In a circumscribed area round each of the little villages men plowed with a crude contraption of sticks shod with iron, or harvested grain with sickles; women spun cotton yarn on whirling bobbins or click-clacked at hand looms. Everywhere the natives dropped their work and came to look at the white men who had superior knowledge about these things.

"*Aie, aie.*" Yakoub sighed. "What these people need is development. A little leading by the hand and showing how; a better plow, a finer loom, a more efficient kiln. They have the material and the mind; all they need is teaching."

"Yep," agreed King. "A little agricultural and mining machinery would

make quite a place out of this valley."

"Yes. But, my dear Kingi—" Yakoub threw out protesting hands— "in time, of course, in time. They must advance slowly and with care. You would not want to see a sudden commercial development spring up among these people. You would not want, for instance—" and here the fear that had been gnawing at him came out and he groaned at the prospect— "if, for instance, those three ruffians should have followed us! You always said how clever is that man. If they should come and discover that there is gold—good God of my fathers forbid it!"

King nodded darkly. Such a contingency would indeed be a dire catastrophe to this fair valley. But still, he thought to himself, if gold existed in anything like the quantity that they—to say nothing of the big business concerns which were on the trail—had hoped, how was it to be developed without machinery, without capital?

THE big village came as a startling climax to the beautiful, hidden valley. The slope eased gently down to the surrounding terraced fields of green and russet and gold, to the irrigation dikes that glittered in the sun, to the brown clustered huts.

There was the immediate prosperous, busy foreground; and beyond it the world vanished. The silver ribbon of river reached the same place and there it, too, silently disappeared. It was a beautiful painted landscape; but the artist had suddenly died and had done no more than smudge in the neutral blue-gray background.

Their guide who had conducted them down the valley turned King and Yakoub over to a graybeard who greeted Yakoub with deference. It was astonishing how instinctively these people had accepted Yakoub in their minds as the leader of the expedition. The old man told him that the high patriarch had summoned the patriarchs of the other villages to a council which would confer far into the night over the astounding things they had heard and that in the morning the assembled sages would see the doctor of knowledge who had brought this great news and would discuss these important things further. In the meanwhile he was at their service.

"I want to go and see that," said King, pointing to the blank cessation of the landscape.

And it was just that. The whole valley fell away over an abrupt cliff. Far down, hundreds of sheer feet down, the treetops of a wide terrace looked like small green umbrellas. Beyond the terrace was another enormous leap into nothing. The flanking hills of the valley suddenly resolved themselves over this edge into mountains that tumbled away in a confusion of precipices, down and away to an indistinct aero map of brown plain.

The little river that passed quietly through the middle of the village took one immense, smooth, emerald leap over the edge, churned itself in midair into a splendid white plume, plunged through the green umbrella tops and disappeared. The lip of the next terrace was a waterless black wall.

"It goes into a hole in the ground," explained the old man.

"Ah," breathed King. "That's the river I prospected up 'way down there in that hellish plain; the subterranean one."

As if to substantiate the fact, a man came running to King. His impetuous approach was in marked contrast to the grave, shy advance of the rest of these people. He embraced King's knees and, taking his hand in both his own, placed it upon his head. King looked at him sharply.

"Oho, so there *is* a way up somewhere," he deduced. "And this is the rogue I couldn't scare into betraying it. Good lad. Is it well with you, wanderer? And have you any more of those little ingots?"

And that brought up the paramount question once more. King turned to Yakoub.

"Here, you've become the boss of the outfit; it's you who's the little tin godling. Ask about those diggings. Maybe they'll tell you something."

But the old man replied to that query with a staggering readiness that implied truth:

"Those diggings? Yes that is where

we get a red earth that we melt with charcoal and it becomes iron for our plows and tools."

And to that story he clung. King would have pressed him for information about other workings. But Yakoub demurred irritably:

"What is the need of such an anxiety, my dear Kingi? Tomorrow after the conference, perhaps. *Aie, aie,* who knows? Who can tell what is the right thing?"

There was another weighty conference of doctrinarians. King was left out of it. These were matters beyond his ken. He was left to wander about at his own devices. Everywhere everybody was friendly and courteous. Whenever he stopped to watch some little activity or household chore he was asked in; he was offered milk and a cool drink made of honey and water flavored with a pungent herb.

And they asked questions—interminable questions. They wanted to know things. How did the white men do this? How did they make that? What was their custom of performing something else? Had they come to teach them their wisdom from far lands?

King nodded reflectively, very soberly.

"All chips off the same old block," he ruminated. "Always want to learn something." He had met Falashas in Abyssinia. They were all the same. Knowledge was their thirst and their hunger.

A messenger came running. The other white man, the learned doctor, was out from the conference and summoned him.

"They're going to show us the amulet," Yakoub grunted.

He stood with shoulders humped up to his ears, arms hanging listlessly, eyes dully apathetic—a picture of extraordinary dejection rather than of the keyed-up excitement that might have been expected from so portentous a disclosure.

The chief patriarch, who stood with him, a benign old gentleman bearded up to his eyes and with his hair an unkempt replica of Yakoub's, only snowy white, scrutinized King with shrewd appraisal. He shrugged in acceptance of a course contrary to his judgment.

"Since you insist," he addressed Yakoub, "that you may do nothing without his sharing in it, and since you are a brother in our faith and stand surety for him, he may see this thing that has been hidden since the beginning of our people. Come, then, to the House of the Amulet."

THE house was a shock to King. He had been picturing a temple at the least—the most elaborate building that the community could produce, surrounded with pomp and ceremony, decorated with the best of the arts and crafts that the people had to offer and jealously guarded by a vested priesthood.

But the House of the Amulet turned out to be a windowless, round stone hut with thatched roof, very much like the rest of the domiciles. Its most outstanding difference was that it stood at the little river's brim closer to the lip of the precipice than any other. The high patriarch produced an enormous iron key from under his white robe and calmly prepared to unlock a not too sturdy door.

"Hm, pretty darn casual about their sacred amulet, aren't they?" King grunted.

The old man seemed to understand the sense rather than the words. He smiled in benevolent enjoyment of a surprise.

"Not sacred—only secret," he said, and pushed open the door.

And the surprise was a crushing disappointment. King had formed no idea of what this amulet might be. A symbolic figure perhaps, he had thought; some ancient thing of mystic design enshrouded in a golden casket. Or an idol of some sort. He had vaguely speculated before he had seen these people; but he knew now, of course, that they had no idols.

The only light came through the single door. King could see that the floor of the hut was paved with irregular stones and that—at the door at least—they had been worn smooth by the treading of countless bare feet. In the center of the hut, upon the bare

stone floor, was a massive raised dais, also circular; a sort of altar it might have been, for the top was roughly flat.

But it was empty. Nothing stood upon the altar. No image, no object of veneration. Alone it stood there, solid, ponderous, uninspiring. And the hut, too, was empty; the walls cold, bare stone, devoid of the least attempt at decoration—no niches, no shrine, nothing. It began to come to King that this altar must be it; this thick circular mass must, for some curious reason, be the ancient amulet. And, yes, those fat round disks of gold that all the men wore at their necks were clearly replicas of this great lump of something; and the lump showed here and there faint traces of worn, square cut characters.

King's eyes were becoming accustomed to the interior dimness. He could see that light glinted off innumerable bright surfaces with sharp edges, apparently hacked out indiscriminately with a chisel. The thing seemed to be composed of a metal of some kind. There was no attempt at design.

Suddenly King cried out and leaped forward, then checked his leap in sudden awe.

"Almighty Pete!" His voice was hoarse.

The light glinted yellow from those sharp chisel cuts, the same as it did from those replica disks. Slowly King approached and ran his thumb along some of the shiny grooves. It was not possible—that whole solid mass. But there it stood, ponderous, huge, winking malignantly from its many facets.

Yakoub suddenly whooped, too, and plunged forward with a great cry. But his emotion was vastly different.

"Those marks—the characters! I can read them. God of my fathers, they are Hebrew!"

Crying, muttering, he pushed King fiercely to one side out of the light and knelt over the worn surface, peering, feeling with his fingers.

But the ancient surface had been cruelly hacked over. With vandal carelessness great slivers of the metal had been gouged out. A letter here and there was intact; fragments of others. Hebrew they were. Yakoub knew them. But any inscription that might have been had long ago been chiseled away.

The ancient patriarch stood by, stroking his long beard and smiling with benign understanding.

"A great weight of evil lies there, my brother, is it not so? Grief and sin and warfare, if men but knew."

"You don't know how this thing ever got here, I suppose?" asked King.

The old man shook his head.

"It has always been here. Our people have no knowledge of its coming. This is our secret. The Amulet of our good fortune, if we use it wisely. From time to time, when we have need, we cut pieces from it and melt it into small ingots, and our young men take these to trade over the mountains.

"Phe-ew!" King whistled through his teeth. "There must be a couple of tons of it. What a miracle—what a story! Hebrew characters. Maybe Solomon's ancient miners. Maybe—who knows? And they've chiseled it away for fifty dollars' worth of trade a year. How many hundreds of years? Gosh! Yakoub, old man, I take it all back. Africa is full of secrets that only a wild romanticist would ever believe. What a piece of loot—if any one could ever get it away."

"But you can't, my dear Kingi." Yakoub was clawing at his sleeve and croaking in an agony of apprehension. "We can not exploit this thing. Kingi, old friend, listen to me."

WITH thin slits of eyes and a twisted smile King harked back to the beginning of this quest.

"Wise old Wizard. He had the right dope. 'And the magic of that amulet is that whosoever shall see it, it shall tear his heart asunder that he can not take it away with him.' He was right. It would need an expedition and an army."

Again the old patriarch seemed to sense his meaning.

"Look," he said, "how wise were these ancient people who fashioned this thing. As long as it is secret it is an amulet of fortune. As soon as the secret might be noised abroad it would become an amulet of evil and death and war."

That thought gripped Yakoub with

a sudden terror. He moaned:

"He is right. How terribly right. conceive of a trader safari getting into this valley."

"And look again," the patriarch continued with religious fervor, "how wise were those ancient ones. If an enemy should come with force to bring evil upon us for the sake of this thing, my young men with strong bars would roll this evil to the edge—but a little distance—where the water goes down into the belly of the earth; and so would the evil be removed from the face of the earth and returned to the earth whence it came."

"Golly!" King was aghast at the prospect. "What a crazy idea! What a colossal crime. Or—" he was darkly reflective— "would it, after all, be a crime *for these people?*"

That was a question that was going to be put to the test with a suddenness as starkly dramatic as the issue itself.

In the open air once more, King remained moodily, almost morosely, thoughtful. He sent long, coldly appraising glances up and down the flanking hills, and nodded affirmatively to his own thoughts. He told Yakoub:

"It's a likely enough place. Any of those rocky ridges might show a surface vein a foot wide. But it would take machinery." He harked back to a picture of ancient activity. "Those old-timers, whoever they were, must have cracked out the ore with fire and wedges and broken it up with hammers by hand and just washed out as much as they could pick up with their fingernails. No mercury, no cyanide; they had nothing except patience. What a job it must have been to make that great lump. And what for?" He turned to his fascinating estimate again. "A little mill, a four-stamp mill, could be dragged in somewhere, somehow—and there's water power."

But Yakoub clutched his arm again with an access of horror.

"But Kingi, my dear Kingi, a mill—you couldn't bring such a thing upon these people." An almost religious anguish worked in his face. "Machinery, people, outsiders, a gold rush. Old friend, you can't do such a thing."

King's face was very hard as he visualized that picture. It was a long and a dark vision. He muttered scraps of words to himself.

"Wise old wizard. We'd see that amulet and we'd do the right thing, eh? Yakoub, you're a weak bellied and sentimental— Hey, look there. There's a commotion about something."

Voices were calling excitedly to one another. There was a running and a scurrying.

People huddled in groups. A woman's voice broke high in a thin wail. A man ran to them and almost dragged them to the house of the patriarch. A young man with his white robe tied about his loins was panting out news that appalled the old man. King's face immediately set hard with apprehension. He recognized the young man as a runner from the village at the upper end of the valley.

"Tell it over again," he ordered, "quick, and miss nothing."

The young man gasped out dire news with telegraphic brevity.

The great black man had sent him, he said, and had promised him death if he delayed. The great black man had been uneasy because of a trouble they had had with a naked people on the plain and he had posted a lookout on a high place to watch the road. And now an army of the naked people was coming up the mountain.

All thought of golden amulets and speculations as to their evil potency vanished.

"How far?" King snapped the important question at the runner.

They were yet very far, and the way was, as the white men knew, very difficult. The great black man was going terribly about preparing to give them war and was driving the young men of the village to hunt up their unaccustomed weapons.

The patriarch stretched tremulous hands out to King. It was noticeable how in his mind the leadership of things in this crisis had reverted to King. The patriarch spoke hesitantly, as one who had not gathered his wits from the disrupting shock of an unprecedented event.

"But what is to be done? It has never happened before. We have known those people from afar; there has never

been any trouble. We have nothing that those naked people can use; nor have they anything that we require. Thus has there been no cause for war."

The old man unwittingly spoke a great basic truth about the bedrock cause of all wars. He did not blame the white men as being instrumental in attracting this catastrophe. He only wondered helplessly what cause should now have arisen.

Yakoub yammered at King's side.

"*Aie,* that this should now come! Kingi, we must—you must prevent this thing. This secret must be kept. It would mean ruin. Go, my friend. Go quickly. I will come as fast as I can. Do this thing for me."

King's face was all hard angles.

"I will," he grunted savagely. "I've owed you this secret for two years. I'll keep it tight for you against those bandits." To the patriarch he said, "Gather your young men, as many as you have, with whatever weapons they have. Send them as swiftly as may be. I'll keep your valley inviolate somehow."

"Alas," the old man wailed, "our tools have always been better than our weapons, and so we have been prosperous." And there he spoke another great truth.

King turned impatiently from him to Yakoub.

"Bring the reenforcements as soon as you can get any sort of weapons into their hands." He took in a hole in his belt. "I'm going to be up there in four hours or bust."

To the patriarch again:

"Old man, quit wailing and give me a herald or an officer, a deacon—somebody with authority to collect up the young men from the villages as I go. Let him run after me. I can't wait."

FOUR hours to traverse fifteen miles would seem to be a lot of time for a strong man. But fifteen miles over rough country, and uphill, is different from marathon running. And then there were those villages to be stirred up.

The little Hottentot trotted tirelessly behind, his keen mind busy with just one thing. Those naked people—was it reasonable that they should make a very troublesome war on account of a broken nose? Did they suddenly decide that the white men's little safari was worth looting? Or had they heard about gold? And if so, what use would they have for it and why had they never tried for it all these many years? None of these questions could be fitted with an answer.

"Something more is behind this, bwana," he insisted. "Some new thing drives them. A magic gives them courage, for, as we know, they are not overbrave."

King only muttered:

"Hanged if I know. Anything can happen in Africa."

And he hurried on. His heart, which had been in his mouth as he drew nearer to the head of the valley, expecting to hear howls and yells and all the uproar of a savage battle, began to subside when he was able to discern the wall of black lava in the distance and the village below it not yet in flames. A decrepit ancient told him that the Great Black One was beyond at the head of the mountain pass, having threatened, bullied, and in some cases beaten, every man who was capable of carrying even a stick; and he had taken all of them with him. King hurried on, sick at heart.

The Masai met him in exactly the opposite frame of mind. His eyes showed rims of white round his dancing black pupils; he breathed enormously through wide nostrils; a corner of his lip fluttered at nervous intervals to show a flash of strong eyeteeth. He greeted King boisterously:

"*Hau, bwana.* That was a swift journey. And indeed I promised death to that runner, did he dawdle. Look, bwana, thus shall the battle go."

King stopped his eagerness.

"So snorts the buffalo. Tell me first swiftly how many are they and where?"

The Masai strode ahead to show. A couple of miles down the lower gorges a glimpse could be caught now and then of a naked figure scrambling over some bare spot. King watched them with moody intensity. The Hottentot was right. So troublesome a foray, requiring a vindictive persistence so foreign to

African character, needed to be explained by something very much more compelling than a smashed nose.

"I have had a man counting all day," Barounggo told him. "A hundred men they must be. *Wah,* it will be a good fight." He was eager to disclose his plan of battle. King knew that the great fierce fellow was steeped in experience; he was willing to listen.

"Thus shall the fight go, bwana. Here where the gorge is narrow and the sides steep I have gathered great stones high up. See, I have posted the men of this village on the flanks in hiding. They are willing, but of weapons they know nothing. When the word is given the stones shall roll and crush those naked ones. Those that break through, I and my ten shall charge upon with shield and spear and shall slaughter them."

King considered the matter frowningly. The great Masai had chosen about the only plan that held out any hope of success. Still, the odds were frightful.

"And what," he asked, "if, let us say, as many as fifty break through?"

"That, too, is foreseen, bwana." The Masai was ingeniously pleased at his own generalship. "The men of this village, having rolled their stones, the half of them shall run swiftly to stand at our backs. If we prevail and drive these naked ones back, the remaining half shall roll more stones. If they prevail and we ten should fall, then—" the strategist paused with the instinctive dramatic sense of his people before he disclosed the single flaw in his strategy.

With meticulous care he fished a tiny horn from somewhere about his waistline; he drew a plug from its end and tapped out a pinch of snuff on to his spear blade; he sniffed it with keen appreciation and then continued:

"If we should fall, bwana, then the affair will be the affair of these people to settle. For us it will have been a good fight."

"Hm." King grunted his only comment to the plan with but a single flaw and went on down the ravine a little way to inspect the possibilities.

The situation was desperate enough, and the issue would depend entirely upon just one thing—how well the invaders would stand up under the combined effect of surprise and organized resistance. If well led—or well driven—their numerical superiority in spearmen was going to be a frightful advantage.

RETURNING from his inspection, King regarded the darkening sky with an anxiety that slowly lifted.

"They can't all of them reach this gorge before dark, and they won't fight at night. That will give us a chance for reenforcements, such as they are."

He made one alteration in the Masai's crudely ferocious plan. This heroic shield and spear stuff. He remembered that some great general, speaking of a similar berserk charge, had said, "It is magnificent; but it is not war." He ordered, therefore:

"Let men build here a barricade of stones in this narrow place; and immediately on either hand let a second relay of boulder rollers stand in readiness."

There followed a night of waiting as miserable as any King had ever known. Voices sounded far down the lower ravine—shouts and calls; fires winked derisive eyes. King kept anxiously awake, assuring himself that no stealthy attack was being planned. Barounggo, with grim gusto, held a strip of hide between teeth and big toe and stropped incessantly at his great spear blade. His ten porters—red eyed fighting men now—took example from him and followed suit. King made an opportunity to ask the Masai what he thought of their courage for the coming fight. Would they stand?

The big man laughed easily.

"Nay, bwana, did not the Wizard of Elgon make a magic for them, the great magic of the lion's teeth, that they might be brave? How can they then fail?"

Shortly before dawn Yakoub arrived. With him were something less than a hundred men from the lower villages, determined enough in demeanor, but woefully armed with a miscellaneous collection of agricultural tools. The best weapon was a heavy sort of cane knife. A few fish spears were there too, serviceable but hardly

strong enough for war.

King marshaled the knifemen in a solid body to support Barounggo's *askaris* behind the barrier. The fish-spearmen he sent up the steep ravine sides to help the stone rollers. And then the patriarchs drove him to frenzy by calling their people to them en masse to spend the remaining hours in loud prayer and exhortation.

Almost with the first daylight a watcher on the ravine side called—

"One comes!"

King and Barounggo shouted, ordered, pushed the men into the positions that had been assigned to them. King put Yakoub in charge on one flank of the ravine.

"Your job will be to see that none of your gang shows himself before I whistle the order to roll. Surprise is our advantage. And you'll act as a sharpshooter wherever you see need."

Barounggo had gone a little way down the ravine to see what might be seen of the advantage. He called now:

"Only one comes. He bears the crossed sticks of a herald."

King immediately climbed over the stone barricade and ordered a whole mob of his heterogeneous force to follow him and to stand massed in front of it as a screen. He beckoned to Yakoub and to the bearded elders to go forward with him to meet this herald.

"I guess they have a right to listen in," he muttered, "since it's on their ground."

The herald swaggered up the last slope of the ravine. A tall, burly fellow he was, as big as Barounggo, but with this difference: While the Masai was decked out in all his savage glory of garters at elbow and knee, leopardskin kilt with tail flying behind, black ostrich plume nodding above his head, this man was naked for war.

He came with a curious rolling gait, brave enough in the face of he knew not what. He strode up to the little group and guffawed in their faces. His eyes, rolling, bloodshot, traveled to the huddled mob in front of the barricade, and he guffawed enormously again.

King was glad enough to note his apparent scorn of the defensive force—so much greater would be the surprise. But Barounggo took the scorn ill.

"Cease thy yawning, baboon," he growled ominously, "and speak thy message."

THE man stared at him with an exaggerated insolence. Then he tossed his head and mouthed his message. Magnificent physical specimen as he was, he seemed to have an impediment in his speech.

"My message is this," he mumbled, "and it is well that the ancient ones of the Hidden People hear."

And from that he rambled on into a grandiloquent and rather incoherent speech full of repetitions and vain boastings. So long was it and pointless at times that King wondered whether the whole thing were not a clever subterfuge to gain time. Only the man did not look to be that clever.

The gist of the long palaver was that the people of the Nabu villages of the Orugniro had a quarrel with the white men. Blood had been shed; only a little, it was true, but a little was enough. Now, therefore, let the Hidden People deliver up the white men and their servants and their goods to the men of Nabu; and there would be peace between the Hidden People and the men of Nabu and the friends and allies of the men of Nabu.

It was to the everlasting credit of the elders that they showed no hesitation. They flung up their hands and lifted their shoulders to their ears and told each other, rather than the insolent herald, that the thing was quite impossible; the white men had eaten their bread and were moreover—or the one of them at least—their brothers.

The Masai could never brook insolence from any of the many peoples whom he considered his inferiors. He looked hungrily at King. King nodded shortly. Barounggo took a single great stride forward and flashed his spear before the eyes of the herald. His voice rumbled from deep in his belly:

"The answer of the white lords to the naked grass apes of Nabu is this blade. Observe it well, fellow. It is the word of an Elmoran of the Masai that within this day's sun it strews thy bowels in

the dust as a pack cord when the day's march is done. For such offal as make friendship and alliance with the monkey people of Nabu there is no answer."

The man gaped at this ferocious outburst with vacant wonder. Then he guffawed again and swung on his heel to go. Barounggo's great arm shot out and gripped him by the shoulder to twist him around. The man lurched unsteadily as he turned and almost fell.

And then King suddenly knew, and his heart went cold. That knowledge explained everything that had been a mystery before. It explained his rolling walk, his vacant laugh, his rambling speech; it was the foundation of his recklessness. It was Dutch courage. The man was drunk.

A drunken savage was no very formidable person. But what chilled King's blood was the knowledge that natives can not acquire that kind of intoxication on muddy mealie-beer, and that on the march they could not carry enough of the stuff to get drunk on at all.

"Oh, the clever, clever devil," he was forced to admire. "Oh, the cunning beast! He won them over in spite of the trouble we left. He knew from the very start. 'A piece of cheap goods and a bottle of squareface'. Swine of hell!"

Yakoub was at his elbow. As yet he had not understood; but he was racked with apprehension.

"What—what is it, Kingi? What have you found?"

"Van Vliet is back of them," snapped King. "That explains everything. Thirty loads of trade goods and gin. That was the price. A big drunk jamboree all together, and good friends all round. A strong alliance with twenty *askaris* and three rifles. He knows how to handle the African, all right."

Yakoub fell back, stunned. His mouth sagged open and his face twitched. For agonized seconds no sound came from him, though his beard's convulsive trembling showed how his throat worked. He clawed at King. Incoherent noises came. Then broken words:

"God of my fathers! Even this. Were not the naked ones enough? And now these three, of all the wicked men in Africa. The abomination of desolation. The end of all things." He dragged at King's arm, sobbing inarticulate things.

King pushed him off roughly.

"All right, all right. Get hold of yourself. We'll stop them. I promised you, didn't I?" His face was as grimly fierce as the Masai's. Through grinding teeth he muttered, "Him or me, huh? Well, here's the showdown."

He roared at Barounggo:

"Get your men lined up there. Throw that mob back over the stone barrier. Up the hill with your side, Yakoub. Hold your shots for white men only—and keep behind cover. Van Vliet is nobody's fool with a rifle at any range. Move, everybody, move."

Swiftly he told Barounggo what he knew to be his true surmise. The Masai understood it at once. He grinned wolfishly.

"Oho, so those naked ones have drunk the white men's bravery out of a bottle. Good. It will not last."

He looked critically at his men and his mob of reserves.

"Let bwana attend to those white men," he growled. "Leave the others to me. It will be a fight. Hear their monkey clamor. They come."

King had a sudden inspiration. Quickly he imparted it to the Masai.

"Take your ten a little way down; fifty paces will be enough. So, when they see you they will halt and mass up. Then will I signal the stone rollers."

THE Masai grasped that strategy at once. Quickly he led his little force of spearmen and lined them across the ravine. Silent, their scowling black faces peering over their big oxhide shields, they were quite formidable enough to give pause to the first comers of the naked men. Their enemies stood and chattered. Some laughed; some shouted insults; some leaped in the air and flourished spears. It was quite apparent that all of them had been stimulated to fighting pitch by something more potent than mere words.

Others came up behind them and added their yells. They pushed from behind. More came. They filled the

gully—fifty of them. More kept piling up behind. They needed just that little something to rush them to the charge.

Then King whistled.

A rattle like machine gun fire commenced on either hill. A snapping and cracking of branches that grew with appalling swiftness to the boom and crash of artillery, the thudding vibrations of which shook the ground.

The naked men huddled in momentary panic. The front and rear fringes could run; but the center was too close packed. Before the mass could disintegrate the avalanche was upon them. A great advance boulder crushed a red swathe through the mass of black bodies. Then the rest of the horrid carnage was blotted out by a cloud of flying dust and rubble out of which came shrieks and smashing thuds and more shrieks.

A small group of frightened men who had been in the front of the mob was left marooned before the hurtling dust cloud, looking back at the death they had escaped. With a roar Barounggo charged down on them. His spearmen followed splendidly. There was a fierce minute of flashing spears; and when the dust cloud began to settle the Nabu men saw over its top only the cowhide shields and the black faces of nine men. One sprawled on his back.

Coolly Barounggo picked up the fallen man's shield and spear.

"That one died like a man," he growled. "Here are weapons for whosoever can use them."

He threw them behind him and, filled with the exhilaration of battle, prepared to charge down over the mangled mess before him at the scared mob beyond. King rushed down upon him and physically pushed him back.

"Back, fool, back! They are too many. Over the barrier. We don't catch them that way again. They will think twice—or their white allies will think for them."

No white men were seen as yet, but it was immediately evident that brains were behind the attack. More men appeared from lower down and massed beyond the rock barrage area. Wary caution was injected into the advance. The men came in short dashes like skirmishers, watching the ravine sides. More stones thundered down, but the damage to the active single runners was slight.

A white face appeared. It was Dago Lopez. He directed operations, ordering little groups of men when and how to run the barrage. He waved an arm and shouted with cool effrontery:

"You see we come after! Now you weesh you share your doublecross weeth us, no?"

King, looking over the top of the barricade, could have shot him down with both eyes shut.

But Lopez for some reason was without a rifle. Some accident must have happened to it—easily enough in any safari travel and particularly during the rocky ascent of the ravine. King felt himself to be held down by that cast iron code which drew an extraordinary distinction between those finely graded emotions, cold blood and hot. And Lopez, while he was in no way bound, knew that King was, and traded insolently on his knowledge.

King cursed his inhibition, as he always did, and promised himself release as soon as action should become sufficiently hot. There was no sign as yet of either Van Vliet or Johan. But King drew no comfort from that.

"Much too smart to take any risks in a rough and tumble spear fight," he grumbled to himself. "He'll show up when he's good and ready. And it'll be in some desperately mean place."

Action came in a rush. Some forty men had run the barrage. Among them were some of the safari *askaris*. Yakoub on his bank moved his men back and sent rocks hurtling against them. Their position became unbearable. Yet they themselves were too few to attack that defended wall. One, barely missed by a rock, yelped and dashed back to the main body. The rest, in a wild demoralized rush, followed him.

Had they been naked Africans alone, that would probably have meant the beginning of a long sit-down-and-do-nothing till some orator should stir up sufficient courage for a renewed charge. But Lopez cunningly sent spearmen to scale the ravine banks and to drive back the

stone rollers.

King groaned. A determined resistance on the slopes might have held off the invaders indefinitely. But he knew that these villagers with knives and sickles could never hold out against spearmen. At that stage he would have shot Lopez without compunction in order to eliminate the brain behind the maneuver. But Lopez most craftily was well concealed behind a rock and only his voice was in evidence.

Closer came the mob of invaders as the men on the ravine flanks were driven back. Close enough for a charge. One tall fellow, brave enough—or drunk enough—to be reckless, shouted his war cry and rushed in. In a howling wave the rest followed.

The barricade disappeared under a black confusion of arms and heads and spears, shouting, straining, stabbing. King sprang up the ravine bank to a flanking position from which he could command all of the wall. Wherever he saw a black shape apparently gaining a foothold on its top he used his rifle. The relay force whom he had stationed closer up the ravine sides rolled their rocks with horrid effect. That charge was breaking up in another shambles.

A shower of smaller stones and rubble clattered past King from above. A white clad body hurtled down and was lost in the black turmoil before the wall. A small avalanche of naked men rolled, scrambled and leaped upon King and swept him from his precarious footing.

The ball of humans, all clinging together like fighting bees, rolled down the slope and thudded full on to the end of the wall.

From the invaders came triumphant howls. The white man was down. The attack took on renewed impetus. King, blinded by dust, choked by a black stomach pressed into his face, could see nothing. He retained sense enough only to know the position in which he was. Struggling, clinging, he put all his effort into trying to roll the man mass over to his own side of the barricade. Somebody shrieked in piercing agony in his very ear. The mass lurched over. They bumped heavily. King did not know which side. He could only hope.

Hot blood gushed into his eyes. It filled his nostrils. The weight above him relaxed. He was dragged to his feet, but not instantly stabbed.

His hands found cloth—somebody's white cotton robe. He wiped his face clear in it. His rifle was somewhere under the stamping, milling feet. Cursing, he dived among straining legs, fighting, pushing. He found the gun and pushed himself up to the surface of the raging human sea. He cursed again; he could feel, rather than see, that his rifle breech was choked with dirt. That was bad. Time and at least a few inches of space would be required for cleaning it.

STANDING perilously on the top of the barricade, the Masai raged to stem the attack. Shield held low to protect his legs, ducking down, leaping high, he avoided with amazing skill the spears that thrust up at him, and he drove his blade down, shouting:

"*Ssghee!* That for thee, ape. *Hau,* a good stroke! *Sszee.* Eat spear, fool!"

Three of his men, roused to a frenzy of emulation, leaped up beside him.

"*Ssghee!*" they shouted. "We, too, are men. *Sszee!* The song of our spears is death."

The attack was breaking up at the foot of the blood spattered wall. Lopez had seen King fall. He felt secure. He darted from his position behind his sheltering rock. If that terrible man on the wall could be stopped the attack might yet win over. Lopez ran up behind the struggling line, his knife poised over his shoulder; he was watching his chance.

The Masai shouted a greeting.

"Guard my feet, fellows," he growled down. And to Lopez, "Ah, the little dark one, the juggler of knives. Look, I give thee a mark."

With reckless bravado he swept his shield aside and exposed his full chest. Lopez snatched at the offer and hurled his knife with all his vicious force. Barounggo ducked as easily as he had ducked under a hundred whizzing spears.

"A poor throw," he taunted. "A child's throw. But look, little dark one. A light spear! A spear balanced close to the blade! Thou knowest it already!

I give it thee!"

Lopez squealed in terror and turned to bolt.

"*Ssszee!*" shouted the Masai with the delight of one who hunted a rabbit.

Lopez rushed on for several paces. Running, he bent lower, and yet lower; his arms spread out clutchingly; his knees sagged; his face slid in the gravel. And so he lay. The thin shaft stood yellow from the very middle of his khaki shirt.

"*Hau,* a good cast," said Barounggo solemnly.

Then he snatched his great stabbing spear again from behind his shield and drove down among the milling arms and faces at his feet.

And still there was no sign of the other two white men. The attack on the wall broke up. The defenders shrieked victory. But King called Barounggo to him and showed him an inevitable development. The spearmen on the hill had all but dislodged the village people and in a little while more would be in a position to climb down and attack the defenders of the wall from the rear. The way had been shown to them, and they had fighting intelligence enough to follow on even without a leader for awhile. And those two other white men must be showing up somewhere soon.

The barricade was a red splashed and tumbled boulder pile. On both sides of it lay contorted bodies and men who moved painfully and moaned—more, of course, on the attacking side. But there was a mob of howling spearmen, blood drunk now, quite numerous enough to make a holocaust of the poorly armed villagers. Retreat was imperative.

"To the lava wall," said King. "How many of your ten have fallen? Choose quickly five others to take their place. We will hold this place while the rest run."

The lava wall could be scaled, of course. But it was rough and difficult. Men standing on its wide top, armed with heavy knives—or even clubs—would have an advantage over climbers.

The Masai had his little troop already filled out; and he added five more sturdy knifemen to their number. King told off bearers to carry the wounded back immediately and passed along instructions to the rest to be prepared to run when the signal was given.

The Nabu men were now divided into three groups. The main body massed a little way down the ravine, inactive for the present, howling rage and threats, lacking only the initiative of a leader; and the two smaller troops of skirmishers who climbed slowly along the steep ravine sides, driving down the stone rollers, shouting enthusiasm at their success.

King called Yakoub down to him. In quick sentences he gave him instructions:

"Give me your gun. Take mine, and for Pete's sake get all this dirt cleaned out. Take all these men and run like hell. Get them lined up along the lava ledge and beat into them it's their last chance. Away with you!"

KING was able to turn his attention to the ravine sides. He was in a fever of apprehension. On one side—the side where he had been—the spearmen had won to a flanking position; they awaited only another frontal attack before climbing lower. On the other side, a steeper slope, they were not so well advanced.

King was cold under the anxiety that Van Vliet and the other ruffian would show up at any minute with some ingeniously devilish plan of campaign that they must have been preparing while Lopez led the frontal attack. Only some heaven-sent accident had held them off this far; but that sort of luck could not continue indefinitely.

High up the ravine side a spearman shouted in glee. He had driven a wretched village youth to a ledge where he could retreat no farther; and now he prodded at him with his spear, trying to pin him to the cliff side. In clear view they stood; the white clad figure flattened against the sliding sandstone, the naked black one clinging spider-like, stabbing upward.

King threw up the rifle he had taken from Yakoub and fired. With enormous deliberation the naked figure let go all his holds. His spear clattered down the slope. Slowly the man pushed

off from the cliff backward. His legs buckled under his weight; his body toppled, sprawled through a swift fall, and crashed on through the bushes of the lower slope like one of the boulders that had preceded it.

Shrill yelps greeted this new angle of the fight. King turned his attention to the men who had won a flanking position. It was a sickening business, this picking off of men like flies from a wall; but it was desperately necessary in order to let the remaining defenders draw off.

A panic grew among the spearmen who had so hilariously hunted the villagers a moment ago. Some contrived to scramble to safety; and those King let go. Some in their desperate anxiety slipped and fell. Some found hiding places. Demoralization was established sufficiently to cover a retreat.

King and his little defending party raced for it. Behind them the Nabu men, inspirited by the flight and quite thoughtless as to its cause, came howling.

As the last man passed through the narrow gap in the lava wall Barounggo swelled his chest with a great laugh of confidence. He told King:

"Let these men go to help that herd on the top, and let bwana go to direct them without fear. This place will I hold alone against all who come."

King, racked with anxiety, grime caked, sticky with blood, could not but envy the man's supreme exhilaration in the sheer joy of fighting. He knew that that narrow passage was an easy place to defend; but he was much too inherently cautious to withdraw all other help, however badly the spears might be needed on the wall.

To Barounggo's disgust he posted five men before the exit. Behind them, at the head of their peaceful valley, old men lifted their hands to heaven and prayed. Some were engaged in helping wounded men who had been hurriedly deposited on the grass King, with ready rifle, waited. The Masai took his stand before the fallen lava block that made the last twist in the passage.

A clamor sounded in the runway, discordant and booming with refracted sound like an ill tuned loud speaker. The Masai laughed and tensed his great shoulders.

Caution is bred of well balanced thought. Africans, fighting, do not think. Urged only by the instinct of the chase, the Nabu men raced into the passage, jostling, shoving, giving tongue. A tall figure without a second's hesitation bounded round the last corner.

The Masai spear licked out and down. The man sprawled, clutching at his middle.

"One," shouted the Masai.

Another man coming saw the trap. He was unable to check himself; he bounded high in the air. The great spear reached him before his feet touched the ground.

"Two," shouted the Masai.

Shouting and frenziedly pushing men choked the turn of the passage. King saw that the position was well defended. He scrambled up to the top to see what went on there. Yakoub, with a great sob of relief, scuttled to him over the broken surface and gave him his rifle. King was equally relieved to feel it in his hands.

At the outer entrance to the passage, not twenty feet below, naked men pushed and milled like cattle at the entrance to a pen. Only a few essayed to climb the craggy wall. They fought bravely enough, these men, but with desperate stupidity. Under a clever leader they could still be dangerous.

"Three," came the voice of Barounggo, exulting at the passage end. And in the next instant, "*Arwhoo-oo!*" he yelled with surprise and pain.

From far away to the left, where the lava flow sloped from the old crater lip, came a little pop, an innocent little sound like a champagne cork. But it was a sound that King had heard under many thousands of conditions. Galvanically he jerked round to look.

On the slope of the crater, five hundred yards away, naked black figures moved. Among them—King's heart skipped and pounded—were two white ones.

The leader at last. Whatever had delayed Van Vliet's cunningly planned flanking party, here he was finally; and in time to be deadly dangerous.

"The passage!" came King's agonized

shout. "Barounggo is hit. To the passage, Yakoub."

But Barounggo's voice came up reassuringly:

"It is naught, bwana. A hole through my arm and shield. A little hole. I have had many such holes."

KING became suddenly very cool. A leader five hundred yards away was a long distance from his men. But King knew exactly how dangerous that leader could be even at five hundred yards. He threw himself flat behind a lava block and pushed his rifle over the top. He waited till his breath came unhurriedly and then pressed his trigger.

One of the white figures on the far hillside flung up his hands and fell forward. King could not distinguish which one it was. The other one immediately disappeared. Faint yells of astonishment came from the black ones.

"Watch that passage," King snapped at Yakoub without taking his eyes from the far hill. "Make that fool Barounggo take cover. Shove his bunch into the passage and hold it. Stuff it with men, but hold it. And watch your wall."

He crawled forward to another sheltering block and waited.

Crash! Black splinters flew from it in front of his face, and another pop came from the hill. Then King knew the white figure that had dropped was the wrong one. Very cautiously he surveyed the terrain before him, gaging the lines of sight and cover. Then he moved forward again at an angle.

Those reenforcements from the hill must be stopped at all costs. They would stop only when the leader was stopped. King was not sure just where that leader lay hidden. There was no smoke from these high velocity cartridges to betray a position.

King watched like a hawk for a lizard. And as fast as a lizard a far figure scuttled from one rock to another. Too fast. King held his fire.

The thing became a duel at long range between two men, each of whom knew to the full the other's skill.

King called over his shoulder:

"How goes the passage? Don't show yourself."

Yakoub's voice came:

"We're holding them. They are not so anxious."

"Good," said King. "Let the natives hold the wall. Van won't waste any shots on them."

At the same instant he fired. He had caught a far glimpse of what might have been a head. Van Vliet's body lurched up into the air and flopped down behind the same rock. The natives on the wall yelled excitement.

King moved never an inch from his shelter. He grinned sourly.

"Too damned suspiciously lucky, falling that way right back behind cover. I can afford to wait," he muttered.

He judged it advisable to change his position, and he did so, relaxing not a bit of his caution. And again he changed, gaining several yards this time.

Crash! Splinters spouted a fountain all round him. He grinned, very pleased with himself.

Long minutes passed. The shouts and yelps that had marked the fighting stilled. Within the passage was a deadlock. Along the wall both sides watched the duel between the two white men; and both knew that whichever white man won, his side would also win.

Crash! King's lava block jerked convulsively and opened in an irregular line down its middle like a split apple. A nervous man might have lost his head and jumped frantically for better cover, and so exposed himself. King lay still and grunted.

"He's in a hurry." And then, "Perfect. I'll chance it."

He knew that the chances were many millions to one against another bullet finding that same slit; he knew, too, that at that distance no man could distinguish such an opening and deliberately aim for it. And he could see through the gap. It was in fact a much better view than any quick ducking and withdrawal of one eye round the edge of a rock.

Critically King studied Van Vliet's position. Not so extra good. That boulder flattened down to the right. If he could work the tiniest bit more broadside . . . King studied his own ground. Tumbled blocks formed a tor-

tuous, shallow trench. By rolling into it he would lose his own view; but the other man would not know that.

Flat on his belly, King wriggled along, fearful of showing even an inch of moving surface. Sharp edges tore his shirt and breeches. Protruding points scored his ribs. He gained fifty yards.

Crash! Far behind him this time. King grinned thinly.

Forty more yards. There was a narrow V between two boulders. A splendid vantage point, if the other man did not know. King reached it and, inch by slow inch, raised his eyes above the slot. He thought he could distinguish what might be a boot and a patch of brown breeches leg behind a grass tuft and some small rubble.

A desperately small mark to hit—but even splinters and flying gravel would hurt enough to make a man jump.

King whistled through his teeth and filled his magazine. With infinite caution again he inched his rifle through the opening. No bullet came smashing to him.

It was his luck—or his skill. All set. He held his breath and fired quickly twice. He saw gravel fly. Van Vliet jerked into view. Like lightning King fired a third time. Van Vliet jerked again and flopped down. But this time a whole arm and shoulder remained visible.

King stayed motionless. But there was no need to fear a clever trick. The distant spearmen showed that. With shrill ululations naked black figures appeared from behind rocks, scrub, out of holes and streamed away over the rise.

Behind King the situation broke up just as swiftly. That shot had hit not only a cold blooded and utterly ruthless scoundrel. It had touched the magic spring of panic.

A high pitched cry of dismay broke out among the Nabu men, and they turned and ran for the ravine gap. The packed mass in the passageway fought each other to get out of the trap. The Masai's roar boomed out of the tunnel and the fiercely exultant *"sghee!"* told that his spear was at work.

The farther opening belched scrambling, screaming men. In a naked black stampede they trailed out as the faster runners got ahead. Behind them bounded the Masai and three remaining *askaris;* and behind them again a white cloud of flowing cotton garments, shouting, stabbing, stumbling.

"Stop him," yelled King. "Stop the crazy fool!"

It was one of those situations so common in any battle. The spearmen could have turned and, catching their pursuers in the open, cut them to pieces. But the leaders who had persuaded them to this war were gone. There was nobody to rally them.

One tall, heavily built fellow could not run as fast as most of the others. He lagged. Barounggo, running and roaring like a lion, overhauled him. In desperation the man turned to give battle. Barounggo yelled supreme joy.

"Oho, we meet! The herald, no less. This is my full day. What did I promise thee, naked one? Behold, this day's sun is not yet gone."

He threw away his shield and advanced upon the man, stepping high on his toes. Those behind him pulled up to watch, eyes rolling white, teeth showing, breath coming fast.

"Spear to spear, baboon," shouted Barounggo. "An Elmoran of the Masai takes no advantage over an ape."

Furiously the big man lunged at him. Barounggo, never moving his feet, swayed only his body. The spearhead swished past his side. His own spear held like a bayonet, the Masai took one swift stride in and heaved up his shoulders. The great blade ripped the naked man from groin to chest. Clutching his awful wound, he sank to the ground, dead.

"Whau!" shouted the Masai. "Such is the word of an Elmoran. A clean stroke, a swift stroke. So strikes the lion in his rage."

King came running.

"Shut up," he told the triumphant Masai. "There will be a time for bragging."

He had changed his mind about the disadvantage of pursuit.

"After them now; chase them well down. Roll rocks on them—give them hell, so they will have a lesson and will never come back. Go, before the sun is lost."

THAT sun went down and the next one too. An awful mess had been cleaned up. Cuts and gashes innumerable had been stitched and plastered. Worse wounds were healing. Dead men had been buried. The valley smiled, as fair and peaceful as before the white men had brought war into it.

Yakoub conferred with King, timidly. He did not know just what to say or how to put his views and hopes before this man with whom he had gone through so much so closely and whom he had thought he understood.

"Kingi, old friend," he attempted, "we have been partners in this venture; we have agreed to share our findings. But, Kingi—you know, your own principle of the square deal; a noble principle, as I have come to learn. And what the wizard said about the right thing for the Hidden People—"

King cut him off bruskly. He knew just what the other was trying to say.

"Yes, yes, I know, I know. And a partnership is to share half the profits and half the worries. That's your principle, you told me. But I renege on that. They're your people. You found them. You can have the worry of them. And that's going to be plenty. I know what you want to do. They'll need leading by the hand; they'll need teaching and developing, slowly, carefully; they'll have to be protected from exploitation. Go ahead and develop them. Do the right thing by them, like the wizard said you would. I'll admit they're a good crowd; the best we've found in Africa. But don't drag me in on the chore."

Yakoub laid a sensitive hand on King's sleeve. His bird-like eyes were not so bright as they usually were. He wiped a ragged shirt sleeve across them to clear them.

"But—but, Kingi, the profits of our partnership that I have so boldly promised to you. This amulet—it is their secret. Nobody knows it now but ourselves. If it is developed it will—"

"Aw, shucks," King cut him short impatiently again. "It's your secret. It was my promise to you. Go ahead and use it. Dig it out in little slivers and send it out and buy plows and looms and books and whatnot. But don't sick that worry on to me. I'm no missionary to develop deserving peoples. I'm just a wandering adventurer."

Yakoub's voice was tremulous.

"But, Kingi, you are in need of money."

King's voice was hard.

"I need just about one hundred and twenty-five ounces gouged out of that block, and then I'll be quits."

Yakoub peered a question through dim eyes. King was muttering figures to himself.

"The way exchange is running, I figure a hundred and twenty-five ounces will make around five hundred pounds sterling. That's Ham Smythe's money, and then I'm clear."

The dimness of Yakoub's eyes passed to his voice.

"Kingi, old friend, Kingi Bwana M'kubwa, that is the squarest deal—"

"Shush, shush." King would not let him finish. "What would I do with that big lump of loot? I can't take it away with me. And the old wizard was all wrong. It doesn't break my heart worth a hoot. They're all wrong. Africa is chock full of secrets for me to go and find out. And I'll tell you one right now. No white man has ever been over those mountaintop trails into Abyssinia. Me, I'm going to go look-see tomorrow. There's no telling what I may turn up. Why—" his eyes narrowed and the eager, faraway look came into them—"Yakoub, I'll bet you there's gold in them thar hills. Why not quit all this and come along?"

THE END

The KNAPSACK

By PIERRE MILLE

Author of "The Shark"

IT WAS two years before the Great War, at a time when the newspapers of Germany published progaganda against the Foreign Legion. My friend, the reporter, had begged me to introduce him to Barnavaux, the Marine, that he might interview him on the Legion.

"He is one man who must know," the reporter said. "He has lived close to Legionnaires, under fire and in camp. If life is harder in the Foreign Regiments than in the Marines he won't hide it."

We met at the Bar of the Dove, which is in Montmartre Street, not far from the New France Barracks in which Barnavaux whiled away his calm days. It is a very charming place, frequented by the best society. A few poor devils come from the vicinity of the Halles Market, where they occasionally earn a few sous unloading and guarding vegetable trucks —humble folk quite crushed by the numbers and social superiority of the newsmongers. These last ordinarily drag along their bicycles, rusty old machines bearing the honorable traces of hard service. The owners never fail to secure them with padlocked chains.

My friend, the reporter, drew from his pocket a picture printed in Germany. It portrayed a touching scene—a Legionnaire tied hand and foot to two palm trees, the leaves of which resembled ostrich feathers, the least pretty sort of feathers, thin and straight like those on ladies' hats. This Legionnaire was quite nude. A pack of wolves, doubtless lured by the odor of fresh flesh, made ready to devour him. In the background torturers wearing French uniforms watched this spectacle with satisfaction.

"That's very interesting," Barnavaux admitted, "very interesting! You should take it to the zoo—because, you see, no one has heard of wolves in Algeria before. It is a new discovery for natural history."

"But that isn't the question," the reporter said. "What is important is to know whether Lgeionnaires are mistreated. That picture is stupid, I grant you; nevertheless, men in the Legion may be molested, beaten, starved. There's the point."

Then I saw a Barnavaux unknown to me until then—a Barnavaux who was politely discreet, a Barnavaux who talked much and said nothing, a diplomatic Barnavaux. Another glass of white wine

with citron syrup did not coax him from this reserve. The reporter could not draw a word from him, and left very irritated.

I deemed that my old comrade had not been kind. This I told him without hesitation. He looked at his sleeve a long time before replying. It was the hour when the second edition of the evening papers was coming out. A scent of absinth teased the nostrils. The newsmongers of *La Presse* and *L'Intran* drained their glasses, wiped their mouths with the backs of their hands, unlocked their machines, vaulted into the saddle, then fled like huge flies between busses, taxis and trucks.

At last Barnavaux shouted:

"Can I say anything here, in Paris, before a Parisian, a man who has never left home, who can not understand? And even if he understood he'd have to pretend that he had not understood. It's his business. In the papers it must be one thing or the other: The Legionnaires are fed on dainty dishes, supplied with champagne, spoken to as if they were young ladies; or the Legion is a hell. No middle ground—the public doesn't like it. How could I explain, explain truly? There is the land, which is not France; there are the men, the Legionnaires, who are not like anybody else and who don't think as you do; and there is the consideration of military fault. Do you know what a military fault is? Are you familiar with the military code? Yes, perhaps; it's condensed in the booklets: 'Death! Death! Death!' That word occurs every three lines."

"I don't see the connection—"

"You will. That's the whole question. Listen. You know Ambatouvinake?"

"Ambatouvinaky?" I repeated, using the French pronunciation while he had used the native. "A village near Tananarive?"

THAT'S it [Barnavaux said]. A company of the First Foreign Regiment had been stationed there during the uprising.

You were in Madagascar at the time, for it was there I met you for the first time, in the Boueni region. A nasty period, that uprising! A cheap little war amounting to nothing; the Fahavales (native raiders, patriots or bandits according to viewpoint) who set fires everywhere around Tananarive, stole cattle, looted rice silos and left without waiting for you; civilians who plagued the soldiers; soldiers who plagued civilians; men coming from the War College with theories on strategy; the use of mountain artillery; converging columns. . . Three kilometers per hour, on good ground, that's what a mountain gun could cover in Madagascar; the Fahavales marched one hundred kilometers per day without trying. Go and catch them!

A lot of us croaked for nothing on the trails—that's a way of speaking, for there were no trails—for over a year. It was bad for a soldier's morale. I had enough myself. I entered the hospital because I had malarial fever and anemia. Paternal discipline, frequent leaves. That's how I happened to see what I am about to tell you, one morning at Ambatouvinake.

A company of Legionnaires had been lined up. Military march, campaign drill, part of the regular training. I can still see that company Were there fifty or sixty men left? Sixty was the maximum. The others? Go and ask for them of the mud flats of Ambouhimenes, of the crocodiles in the Betsibouke River. And those who had held out were not fat. Oh, their hollow cheeks, their yellow brows, their pale ears, their eyes! You can never forget those eyes! The eyes of a man who drinks in sickness and in health, the eyes of fever and alcohol, with the pupil enlarged, smearing over the white; eyes of battle, of misery, of resignation, of madness.

But the men were clean as new money. Not only the weapons, not only the uniforms which were brushed, pressed, neat as for a parade. Not only that—their flesh also, the dry and scaly flesh of veterans, washed, scrubbed, scraped from head to toes. Because it is their pride to be clean from head to foot, cleaner than any other soldier on earth. It is the glory and the mania of the Legion; and when they chance to meet us on the roads, us—the Marines—they hold their noses as if we stank. Marines and Legionnaires are seldom placed side

by side in camp. They do not get along.

The captain was Collet, the lieutenants Sercq and Barillot. I learned the names later. The men had knapsacks on their backs. Lieutenant Sercq walked between the lines. There was one man who bore no knapsack. The lieutenant spoke—

"Katzmann, why don't you carry your knapsack?"

The man did not answer. The captain came near.

"Katzmann, pick up your knapsack!"

Katzmann picked up the knapsack, which had been on the ground with straps unbuckled, and left the ranks with his rifle at carry arms. But he halted after six steps, joined his heels and faced the captain. Then he threw the knapsack to the ground. His lips moved, but he did not utter a sound. His whole body vibrated with a queer trembling that moved the rifle. And the captain looked at him, waiting patiently for him to make up his mind.

"*Mon Capitaine,*" Katzmann said at last, with a thick German accent, "I don't want to."

"What is it you don't want?"

"I won't carry the knapsack; it's not regulation for military marches. Legionnaires in the colonies have the right not to bear knapsacks."

He was right. It is one of their privileges. The sun strikes hard enough, the task is difficult enough, so that useless fatigue should be spared them. When campaigning, on the trails, it is different, and they never complain. But it is another thing when one plays at soldiering, when all that is done is simply to pass the time!

"It's a training march," the captain explained. "Pick up your knapsack."

"I won't," Katzmann said. "I won't! It's unjust. It's against regulations. I shall not carry the knapsack before niggers, before dirty savages. I am a white man. I have been eight years in the Legion. I have never carried the knapsack on the march, never, never. I shall not pick it up, Captain."

He was stubborn. I was looking on from a distance. It was extraordinary, impressive, to see this man, who now howled at the top of his lungs, remain with his rifle straight nevertheless, his eyes fixed on a spot six paces ahead, in a military position. One goes to the Legion for several reasons—because one has deserted; because of an unwise deed; because one is broke; to plague the family; to eat. But many are there merely because they have no will power, no moral spine; they need to be commanded, to be braced right and left, behind and before. Then they are like old children—very drunken, not at all mean, almost invariably obedient, but at times stubborn over nothing. And when they become stubborn, you can't get them to understand anything. They don't want to know anything.

"All right," the captain said, annoyed. "Read him the military code."

The adjutant opened his booklet and read aloud—

"Disobedience on a territory in a state of war or siege: five to ten years' hard labor."

I knew the inevitable consequence. Four men with fixed bayonets would take the prisoner to the prison, then there would be a court-martial and a conviction. That was to be taken for granted. I was sorry, but I couldn't see what else could be done. Yet, the public works, hard labor—what an atrocious thing! The captain opened his mouth to speak, but he had not uttered a word when Lieutenant Sercq whispered in his ear.

"All right," the captain said. "Try."

Then he ordered:

"By sections, left—face! March!"

The company left, and Katzmann watched it leave. He was all alone now. The lieutenant had stepped behind him and, catching sight of me, said without kindness, but in a low voice—

"What the hell are *you* doing here?"

I saluted and went some distance away, behind a bush. I wished to know what would happen. My heart was beating hard; just why I can't tell. Katzmann was still at attention, but his glance followed, despite his desire, the little square spot made by the company dwindling across the rice fields. From time to time small black pigs scuttled by, snouts lower than legs; or a few little negroes, all naked and just as black, ran by so fast one could scarcely distinguish them from the pigs.

In a wind, the red soil of Madagascar created that red dust that you know, from a whirling cloud of which Malgasy emerged, black trousers snug on their buttocks, a white *lamba* on their backs: European clerks to the waist; draped black statues above.

They saluted Katzmann respectfully as they passed, for he was a valiant warrior. But Katzmann did not stir an inch. Only it was obvious that he could not understand what was happening. He was waiting for a detail to take him to prison, and that detail did not arrive. He was demoralized.

Lieutenant Sercq was still behind him. I remember him very clearly, that lieutenant—a stocky officer with gray eyes and a very thin, long nose that started from the eyes and formed a beak—not the beak of Jews and Armenians but of Bretons and Morvandiaux, you know? Perhaps like that of the Vendeans, but those have larger heads. That beak gives one a knowing, fierce appearance.

Suddenly Lieutenant Sercq took three steps forward, swung his leg—and gave Legionnaire Katzmann the most magnificent kick in the pants I ever saw in my whole life. Katzmann had not expected it, and he stumbled forward to get his balance. At the same time the lieutenant picked up the knapsack, threw it on the man's back, hooked one strap over the shoulder. Meanwhile his boot kept busy, and he shouted:

"Run, you swine, run, run! That's enough! Run!"

Katzmann was bewildered. The knapsack was on his back, that was a fact. Therefore he hooked the second strap himself, from habit, buckled the equipment and started off with long strides, scowling furiously. He passed very near me without seeing me. But I heard him grumble in his mustache:

"Damn! Damn! The slob, the slob!"

But he kept walking and joined the company.

* * *

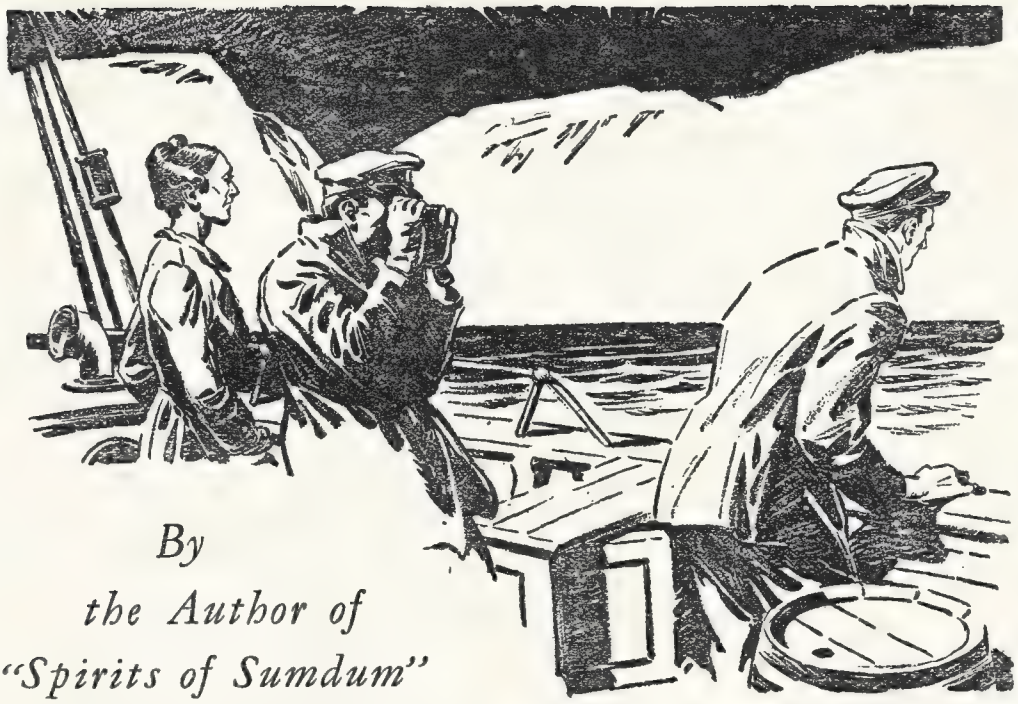
"Well," Barnavaux concluded, "if I had told your reporter that story, what would he have understood?"

"But what about Katzmann," I asked, "what happened to him after that?"

"Don't know. Never saw him again. Nothing could happen. It was over. I suppose he thought that Lieutenant Sercq knew the proper manner to handle him; he had kicked him in the pants, but not before witnesses, and Katzmann's honor was safe. Moreover, it spared him court-martial. One feels a certain gratitude for such favors, ordinarily."

ANNOUNCEMENT

IN accordance with popular request, ADVENTURE will appear in an enlarged format, beginning in June. Read this issue's Camp-fire for further details.



By the Author of "Spirits of Sumdum"

Conditional Surrender

By AUGUST EBERHARDT

SKIPPER Andy McDougall, of the trim forty-foot mine-tender *Amy*, balanced his squat figure upon the slanting deck of his stranded vessel and peered with puckered brows in to the dwindling darkness of the sub-Arctic Summer night. Above the creamy white of the silt laden glacier water he made out the tufted tops of a number of spruce saplings which extended in a straight line ahead of the bow of his boat.

The skipper shook his closely cropped head with suspicious misgivings. These saplings were the markers he himself had planted to guide him safely across the shallows of Glacier Passage, which afforded a short cut on his many trips between the Ready Bullion Mine that employed him and Juneau, the nearest seaport and the capital of Alaska.

The *Amy* had buried her sharp nose deeply in the soft glacier silt, although Skipper McDougall had steered exactly in line with his markers. The accident, therefore, seemed incomprehensible, unless one allowed for the ugly supposition that the markers no longer pointed out the narrow, navigable channel; that they had been moved—moved with the deliberate aim of leading his boat astray.

Skipper McDougall dropped the pike pole which he had used in trying to shove the bow of his boat off the mud bar. Above the savage grinding of the reverse gear his ringing voice reached the scared and freckle faced youth at the wheel:

"Shut 'er off, kid. It's no use. We're stuck here until the tide lifts us."

As he entered the pilot house the skipper paused for a moment in the doorway, his gray eyes attracted by the stout little steel safe that was built into the opposite wall above the floor. Upon his weather tanned face appeared a shrewd smile of comprehension. It had occurred to him that the contents of that little safe might furnish the underlying cause for his present mishap.

The silence that followed the noise of the engine and the rumbling of the reversed propeller was presently broken by the angry screeching of a female voice. It came from the foot of the companionway leading to the tiny wardroom below deck. There a tall, sharp featured, middle aged woman had appeared, in an obviously angry mood caused no doubt by the rude awakening she must have experienced when the boat rammed full speed into the mud. Barefoot, with a wrapper hastily thrown over her nightgown, and her gray tinged black hair tied in a warrior's knot upon the top of her head, she appeared like some hostile brave upon the warpath as she advanced with angry strides upon the little skipper.

"What's the meaning of this, Captain McDougall?" she demanded wrathfully, while nursing with a wet cloth an incipient swelling upon her forehead. "Don't you know your trade well enough yet to make a landing without breaking your passengers' heads?"

The skipper's own quick temper was roused by her stinging remark. He was about to reply in kind but for the timely remembrance that, as one of the principal stockholders in the company he served, Mrs. Spiker enjoyed unusual privileges in her treatment of its employees. Besides, he argued, she was even now in the act of terminating her annual visit to the Ready Bullion Mine, where, because of her habit of prying and fault finding, she had come to be regarded as a general nuisance by every one employed there—including her own son-in-law, the superintendent of the mine.

Swallowing, therefore, the angry retort that had sprung to his lips, the skipper replied instead:

"I dunno, ma'am, as how pilin' this boat on to a mud bar could be called makin' a landin' in the proper nautical sense."

Not until now did the lady seem aware of the rigid slant of the deck. The discovery that they were stranded seemed to increase her resentment against the skipper. Angrily she followed him on deck, where she gave free vent to her ugly mood by alluding unflatteringly to the question of his efficiency as a pilot.

BUT Skipper McDougall seemed to have become oblivious of the chattering woman behind him. With his right foot on the railing and his left hand holding to the bow stay, the skipper's eyes searched the rapidly dissipating gloom. Already, off the starboard bow, the snow crested peaks of the Alaskan Coast Range were beginning to glow in the first rays of the rising sun, while straight ahead, and but a quarter mile distant, there evolved under the skipper's strained gaze the nebulous shape of Sea Otter Point, stretching away from the mainland in the form of a gigantic beast crouching upon the calm expanse.

"What gets me," the woman kept up her fretful complaints, "is, that after the many times you have safely crossed these shoals with nothing more valuable aboard than mining tools or grub, you should pile her on the mud now, when she's carrying a consignment of thirty-eight thousand dollars' worth of bullion. It seems almost—"

Mrs. Spiker got no further. A peremptory motion of the skipper's hand had cowed her into momentary silence. Through the quiet that followed came the distant sputtering of an engine being started. Gradually the sound toned down to the smooth, drowsy hum of an efficiently working motor. A moment later the dark silhouette of a power launch dissolved itself from the shadow of the Point and streaked smoothly out upon the open water.

"Seems as how we're soon goin' to find out the reason why we been led into this trap," the skipper remarked evenly, pointing to the distant boat.

"You believe—" Mrs. Spiker's pointed face had lost most of its harsh expres-

sion. Her voice was tinged with fear.

The skipper nodded, a mischievous smile flitting across his face. He was having his revenge for the aspersions she had cast upon his nautical skill.

"Yes, ma'am," he confirmed her unvoiced suspicion, "I believe them fellows out there is after the hundred an' twenty pound bar o' bullion we carries in the ship's safe. Them's pirates, ma'am!"

Then, becoming aware of the lady's evident alarm, his innate good nature gained the upper hand once more, and he added in a kindly tone:

"But don't worry, missus. Them kind o' guys is out after swag an' not likely to harm you. Jes' you keep out o' sight, an' I promise to handle the situation in a way so they won't ever come near you."

In spite of her earlier unflattering allusions to the skipper's good sense, his latest advice seemed to strike Mrs. Spiker as uncommonly sound; for without another word she hastened off to her tiny stateroom below deck.

Beside the skipper appeared the lanky, freckle faced youth, who as mate, deckhand and engine wiper comprised the crew of the *Amy*. One red-lidded eye was batted in a knowing wink.

"That—that was a smart crack you made about the pirates, Skipper," he confided with a twisted grin that indicated apprehension rather than the amusement it was meant to convey. "O' course, you only said it to git rid o' her, didn't you, Skipper?" he added hopefully.

But there was no trace of a responsive smile upon the skipper's face as he kept watching the strange craft while it passed squarely in front of a large stranded iceberg. During that moment five human figures, standing in a row, appeared sharply outlined against the bright background of the ice. It was as if some ugly monster had bared its teeth in a menacing snarl.

The skipper turned from the sight to inform his nervous interrogator—

"Son, I was never more in earnest than when I said that."

A moment later the forward hatch cover dropped into place above a rusty mop of hair.

WHETHER it was due to the prompt and unequivocal declaration of neutrality in the expected struggle on the part of his crew, or because of the overwhelming odds arrayed against him, the skipper's next action—calmly sitting down on the railing and lighting his pipe—indicated plainly that his plans for meeting the threatening situation did not include the item of armed resistance.

In her devious approach the strange launch was nosing her way carefully along a winding channel between the shoals, her movements guided by a tall, bulky fellow who stood in the bow and imparted his directions to the helmsman by motions of his arms. As the diminishing distance, together with the rapidly increasing daylight, brought his figure into clearer view, Skipper McDougall found his interest gradually concentrating upon this man. Presently, when the launch scraped against an ice floe, the giant pilot in the bow turned upon the helmsman, and his deep, booming voice sounded across the water in an angry exclamation. At this the skipper pricked up his ears, while an expectant look crept into his eyes.

By the time the shallow-draft launch had crept under the stern of the stranded *Amy*, the light had become strong enough for the skipper to distinguish the features of his uninvited callers.

The first to step aboard the *Amy* was the huge pilot of the launch, evidently the leader of the gang; for, while the others delayed to tie up their boat to the stern of the stranded vessel, he came straight for the skipper in long slouching strides. His unruly black hair hung low over his narrow forehead and mingled with the heavy brows above his dark, cunning eyes. A broad grin parted the forest of whiskers which framed his face, disclosing a set of large, uneven and darkly stained teeth. Except for the fact that a large hairy hand rested casually upon the butt of a revolver in his holster, there was little about the visitor to indicate the sinister purpose that brought him there.

"Sorry, Skipper, for leadin' your boat on to the mud," he offered by way of greeting, "but seein' as how the *Amy* is

the fastest craft hereabouts, it seemed the only way for to arrange a little quiet interview with you. I hope you don't mind this layin' over for a spell."

"Not at all," the skipper politely reassured his apologetic caller. "Since the boat ain't took no damage, an hour more nor less don't matter. The engine needed coolin' off a bit anyway."

The newcomer seemed visibly taken aback by the skipper's frivolous acceptance of the situation. His fingers tightened around the butt of his revolver. His eyes roved about him as if suspecting a trap. Once more they fastened searchingly upon the bland face of the skipper, who sat quietly puffing at his pipe.

"Say, brother, perhaps you don't realize what we're here for?" he muttered softly.

"Wa-al—" the skipper spat smartly through his teeth—"I kin guess, anyway."

"Hm-m. In which case you take it pretty cool, pardner."

Andy McDougall shrugged his square shoulders.

"The way things turned out, I can't be blamed fer what's happenin'. Besides, why should I worry? It ain't my gold you're after."

Once more the forest of whiskers parted in a broad, pleased grin.

"That's the sperrit, brother, the proper way to look at the situation. I kin see right now there won't be no hitch in the little business that brung us here. An' if ever'thing goes smooth, you have me word as a gent that you'll be chuggin' off in your boat as soon's the tide floats you."

"Thanks for the promise, pardner," the skipper acknowledged gravely. "The tide is due to turn at 2:16. It ought to be 'most that time now," he added with a questioning glance at the stranger's vest pocket, where a circular bulk indicated the presence of a watch.

Whiskers obligingly produced his watch and held it out for the skipper's inspection.

"It's 2:30 already," his deep voice rumbled, "an' the run-in o' the tide oughter be well started. Your ship'll be afloat in less 'n an hour," he predicted after an appraising glance over the side of the boat.

But the skipper was not listening. The moment the stranger had reached for his vest pocket, a look of wistful expectancy had crept into his gray eyes. Now his fingers actually trembled as he held them out to handle the magnificent gold timepiece which his caller had produced.

For a moment he regarded it lovingly.

"That sure is a swell watch you got. It must 'a' set you back a heap buyin' it," he said as he returned it with evident reluctance.

"Didn't cost me a cent, brother. The watch was given me by a noble hearted gent in reckergnition o' me talents as a rustler."

"He sure thought a lot of you, considerin'."

"It's me methods as fetched him," Whiskers explained modestly. "When he saw my work he was so taken by it, he jes' couldn't help handin' me this little token o' his appreciation."

WHILE the two skippers were thus engaged in an amiable exchange of courtesies, the remaining four members of the launch crew had crowded forward, holding in their midst the trembling figure of the deckhand, whose hiding place they had discovered. The brightening daylight disclosed them as an evil looking lot, carrying heavy guns in their holsters, while their surly looks indicated plainly that they had no patience with their leader's observance of social amenities.

Whiskers, too, seemed to have become aware of his companions' mood. His huge figure stiffened.

"Well, c'm on, Skipper, let's get to business," he rapped out sharply.

In reply Captain McDougall swung a lazy thumb in the direction of the safe that was visible through the open door of the pilot house.

"There she is, boys. Help yourselves."

A glance at the safe satisfied the experienced robbers that it was of the latest make, calculated to resist for hours any effort to open it by force.

The heavy brows of the pirate leader drew together in a threatening scowl.

"Listen, brother," he rasped harshly,

"we got a hurry date some'eres else, an' means to cross the flats on this tide. Fact is, we been sort o' bankin' on your good will for the success of our visit here, knowin' that you got the combination o' that safe. Sure," he persuaded with a grim smile, as he poked the muzzle of his gun into the skipper's ribs, "you ain't got the heart to disappoint us now?"

For a silent moment the skipper eyed the gun pressed against his side, his glance traveling slowly upward along the arm to the determined looking face of the man who held it. Quietly he rose from his seat.

"All right, boys." He turned upon them within the door of the pilot house. "Seein' you feel that way about it, I guess I'll open that safe for you. That is, I'll do it on one condition."

Undismayed by the angry glances of his audience, the skipper went on to submit the modifying proviso to his agreement.

"Considerin' that I'll probably lose my job for helpin' to put you boys in the way of a fortune, it might be fittin' on your part to come through with a little token of reckergnition for my services."

"What the hell! Is it a rake-off you're after?" Whiskers barked angrily.

"Gosh, no! It wouldn't be proper for me to accept any o' the company's gold, you know. But, say, if you was to make me a present of that fine gold watch you're sportin', that'd be different. It'd sorta help to balance things—would make this bargain seem less one-sided."

A chorus of derisive laughter followed his proposal. Cries of—"The gall of the fellow!" "That shows the Scotch blood in him," rose from among them. Even the man most concerned by the impudent request could not suppress an amused smile.

"But why particularly my watch, Skipper?" he asked indulgently.

"'Cause it ain't yourn, but mine," the skipper contended heatedly. "I'm the noble hearted gent as couldn't help handin' it to you that dark night in Juneau, when you asked me for the time with a gun pressed against my stomach."

A glow of enlightenment was seen to spread over the arid spaces of Whiskers's face, while the skipper continued earnestly:

"Sure you ain't forgot our mem'rable first meetin'? It happened a year ago las' March. I was walkin' down Front Street below the Juneau sawmill, when you bobbed from behind a pile o' lumber an' took me by surprise."

Not at all abashed by the disclosure of how he had actually come into possession of the ornate timepiece, the pirate leader shook the little skipper's hand as if in him he had found a long lost brother.

"So you're the gent I was dealin' with that night? Well, well! Sure glad to meet up with an old client o' mine. Parties I've had business dealin's with afore allus seems more open to reason on second meetin'. They knows my methods an' never makes no trouble. No doubt, it's because you reckergnized me from the start that you give in so graceful-like."

"Well, maybe so," the skipper replied with an indifferent air, while he calmly held out his hand for his watch. "In the meantime I refuses to open that safe unless I gits back my property."

His dogged persistence provoked a wrathful snarl from the pirate leader.

"Why, blast you, you little runt! You must be jokin'. That watch ain't yourn no more. It come into my possession along reg'lar an' reckergnized business channels. Besides, I need it. There ain't another like it in all Alaska."

"You're tellin' me?" the rightful owner of the watch argued shrilly. "It was the greatest property I ever owned. It was given me by a rich sportsman whose life I'd saved. I was mighty proud of it while I had it, and ain't passed a day since you took it off me without hopin' to come acrost it again. Now that the chances o' gittin' it back again promises fust rate, I means to make the most of 'em."

AT THIS stage of the discussion one of the men passed around a wink, and the whole gang of pirates drew off to the stern of the boat, where they put their heads together in whispered conference.

When they returned a few minutes later Whiskers's face glowed with the righteous resentment of a man whose momentary weakness is being unfairly exploited.

"Here, you thickheaded little Scotchman, here's your ole onion," he voiced his protest as he handed over the watch. "Though I must say that your askin' for that watch at sech a time seems nothin' short of extortion—a plain holdup I calls it," he finished with crushing contempt.

While a shameless smirk radiated over his broad face, Captain McDougall slipped the watch into the starboard pocket of his leather vest. A moment later he was kneeling in front of the little wall safe. A few twists of his wrist and the door swung open. To the men gazing interestedly over his shoulders there was revealed, as the only contents of the safe, a strongly made, sealed canvas bag, fitting loosely over some bulky object. The skipper, taking hold of it, dragged it from the interior of the safe and allowed it to slip down to the wooden floor, where it landed with a heavy thud.

While five pairs of eyes concentrated upon the canvas bag and ten eager hands reached for it, the safe door slammed unobserved.

"Holy smoke, that's some heavy!" one of the men called out as he strained in lifting the bag off the floor. "Why can't they melt it into smaller bars an' make it more easy to handle?"

"That's done so robbers 'd find it harder to git away with it," Skipper McDougall, getting up from the safe, enlightened the questioner.

A peal of ironic laughter greeted his naive statement.

The pirate chief had meanwhile produced his pocket knife and, bending over the bag, he made a slit in its side. It revealed the bar of bullion, dull yellow in color and shaped like a loaf of pan bread. Cast into its under side was the company's assay mark and the bar's weight in ounces. Whiskers applied the edge of his knife to the coarse grained surface of the brick and scratched the comparatively soft metal before he nodded his satisfaction.

"All right, boys," he said, rising. "Be darned careful you don't drop it between the two boats when you hand it over. It'd sink through the soft mud right down to bedrock."

While his four companions made off with the loot, Whiskers, remaining behind, turned upon the skipper with a cunning smile.

"Well, brother," he began suavely, "I been thinkin' a bit about this bargain we made, an' I'm sorry to say that I've had a change of heart. Seems as how I took such a shine to that little watch that I jes' can't bear the idear o' goin' off without it. So, ef you don't mind—"

During the last words Whiskers had whipped the gun from his belt and shoved its muzzle against the region of the skipper's heart, while with his left hand he dived into the right hand vest pocket of his victim. It was instantly withdrawn—empty!

"Where is it?" the robber hissed in a quick burst of anger.

Skipper McDougall pointed a stubby forefinger at the safe.

"In there," he stated briefly.

"Smart, eh?" Whiskers glared fiendishly while prodding his pistol in the other's ribs. "Well, you git it out, an' be damn quick about it."

From astern came the sputtering noise of the pirates' engine being started. The skipper drew himself up to his full height of five feet five. His eyes glowed, his features expressed indomitable will.

"The only way you will ever see that watch again is for you to smash that safe!" he pronounced with steely finality.

In the face of this unexpected opposition the pirate's own resolution began to waver. Even if he killed the man, he would be no nearer his goal . . .

Hurried steps sounded along the deck. The figure of one of the gangsters appeared at the door of the pilot house.

"Hurry up, Chief. Let's be off," the man urged. Then, becoming aware of the situation, he voiced his protest. "Hell, Chief! Why bother about that watch an' maybe spoil a clean job by addin' murder. Come along now. You'll be able to buy a basketful o' gold

watches out'n your share of the swag."

Evidently glad of an excuse for backing out with some remnant of dignity, the pirate leader was readily persuaded. Quietly he replaced the gun in its holster.

"I guess you win, brother," he admitted with a wry smile, "at least until we meets again."

"Whenever that happens you'll find the *Amy* better fixed for to receive visitors o' your type," Captain McDougall issued his parting challenge after the retreating pirate.

FOR some time Captain McDougall stood watching the pirate boat as she sped across the slowly rising water of Glacier Passage. The *Amy* also had profited by the incoming tide and was now lying nearly at an even keel. The skipper switched on the engine. A few turns of the reversed propeller easily pulled her nose off the mud. Followed ten minutes of slow and careful navigation among the shallows. Then the deckhand in the bow reported "no bottom," and put away his sounding pole. They had entered deep water.

Skipper McDougall advanced the engine to full speed and handed the wheel over to the freckle faced youth.

"Straight course for Juneau," were his instructions.

A moment later he was once more on his knees before the safe. A broad smile lighted his tanned face as the door swung open and revealed as its only contents his precious watch.

Tenderly he removed it, held it to his ear and listened to its ticking with the fatherly solicitude of an old family doctor watching for the dread symptoms of angina pectoris. But to all appearances months of alien retention had had no injurious effects on the delicate mechanism. Skipper McDougall breathed a deep sigh of relief, rose from his position—and met the cold, accusing eyes of Mrs. Spiker within two feet of his own.

With her tall bony figure erect and rigid, her pale, pointed features expressive of wrathful indignation, she stood there like a goddess of vengeance come to exact a reckoning. Under her icy scrutiny the skipper's happy smile froze into an embarrassed grin.

"Well, what have you got to say for yourself, Captain McDougall?" With a metallic ring the words issued from her thin, bloodless lips.

" 'Bout what you mean, ma'am?" the skipper essayed uneasily.

"What a question! I'm referring, of course, to the shameful bargain you drove with those robbers. It'll be no use for you to deny anything, for I was listening at the door of my stateroom to every word that was said."

"That I kin believe, ma'am."

"What I want to know is why you did not make even an attempt at defending your employers' property?" Pointing to the rifle rack on the wall of the pilot house, she went on, "What do you think those loaded rifles were put there for but to use on occasions like the present one?"

The skipper shrugged his shoulders.

"A swell chanct I'd 'a' had—one man against five. Besides, I was thinkin' of you, missus. Bullets would zip right through this wooden hull, an' with a lady passenger aboard I couldn't take the risk of a bombardment."

"Very considerate of you, I'm sure." Her thin lips curved in a scornful smile. "But let that pass. Heroism is a trait not given to every man, and nature has evidently neglected you in that respect. Your unforgivable sin is in not disposing of the gold before these scoundrels could lay their hands on it. You had plenty of time to throw the bullion overboard before they came on deck."

"Ma'am, ef I'd 'a' chucked that bar overboard an' marked the place, them pirates would 'a' found it as easy as ourselves. An' ef I didn't mark it, it would 'a' been lost to us as much as to them."

"Far better the gold were lost entirely than to have it fall into the hands of these wretches."

But the skipper held different views on the subject.

"Wouldn't they of been mad ef they found they was cheated out o' their boodle?" he argued. "Goodness knows what they'd 'a' done to us in their disappointment. Leastways," he added with artless logic, "it ain't likely that I

ever would of got my watch back, ef I didn't have the contents o' that safe to trade on."

"Your watch!" A world of withering scorn lay expressed in these two short words. "To be sure, you'd have missed getting it back. And, like the Judas you proved yourself, you did not hesitate to sell out your employers' interests in return for a paltry advantage of your own."

"Them's harsh words, ma'am." The skipper sadly shook his head. "To a poor man like me a five hundred dollar watch is somethin' to be reckoned with. Tryin' to git it back from the man who robbed me of it seemed worth any means—fair, or not so fair."

"I would decidedly class your bargain as belonging in the second category of means you mentioned," Mrs. Spiker flashed with cutting sarcasm.

"Not altogether up an' above board, ef that's what you mean, ma'am." The skipper's head nodded in thoughtful assent, as if the sense of his guilt had just begun to dawn upon him. "I'm afraid, ma'am, some others will come to see it in the same light."

"I can assure you, your employers—" the lady started to say, when the skipper broke in:

"I warn't thinkin' o' them so much, ma'am. It's among Whiskers an' his pals where my repitation for fair dealin' is likely to suffer considerable. I have an unaisy feelin' as ef right now they was exchangin' many unkind remarks about me."

His last words, accompanied by a canny smile, arrested Mrs. Spiker in the act of terminating a painful discussion by her exit from the premises.

"You don't mean—" she gasped, wide eyed.

"Wa-al, come along down to the engine room, an' I'll explain by way o' demonstration."

DOWN in the engine room Skipper McDougall set the stage for the coming disclosure by first spreading several thicknesses of newspaper carefully upon the clean floor. Next he peeled off his leather vest and rolled his shirt sleeves well above his elbows. Then, lifting up a section of the floor boards, he uncovered the bilge, with the propeller shaft turning restlessly an inch or so above a dark, unsavory surface of dirty, oil covered water. Into this slimy mess the skipper dived deeply with his right arm, groped about for a moment, and then began to drag heavily on what presently revealed itself as a strong rubber-coated canvas bag, its outside covered with the slime of the bilge.

Depositing the dripping bag upon the paper covered space on the floor, Skipper McDougall carefully undid its watertight fastening, and from out the slimy husk he extracted a heavy canvas bag, an exact replica of the one the pirates had requisitioned as their loot.

Pointing to the seals on the immaculate new bag, the skipper offered:

"Since it's against the rules for me to open that bag, you'll jes' have to take my word for it, ma'am, that this here is the real stuff. At least, I'm sure the mint at San Francisco won't have no kick comin' when it reaches there."

"Meaning that you sent those wicked robbers away with a worthless dummy?"

A pained expression had crept into the skipper's face as he corrected her with rueful words.

"Wa-al, ma'am, I wouldn't go so fur as to call it worthless. I paid out four bucks for the lead that's in it; two dollars an' sixty for the outside casin' o' soft copper alloy, not to mention the fine eight dollar nugget I had to donate for to make it a good job of electroplatin'. Fourteen dollars an' sixty cents that dummy gold brick cost me; not countin' the work o' makin' it, which was done gratis by my brother who works in the company's assay office."

A quite unexpected sweetness had crept into the woman's angular features as she exclaimed:

"How cleverly you have handled this affair, Captain! I wonder what first inspired you with the idea of carrying a dummy brick in the safe?"

There was an unmistakable ring of satisfaction in the skipper's voice as he replied:

"Wa-al, mostly it's due to your own efforts for econnimy, ma'am. Remember two years ago when I puts in an

application for an armed guard on the *Amy* on the trips she carries bullion? Well, it was you as voted down my motion as a needless expense, p'intin' out that, with the *Amy's* speed an' them two rifles in the rack, I oughter be able to keep outa trouble.

"But I'm an ole hand in this here business, ma'am; an' I sees the time comin' when neither the ship's speed nor a rifle in my hand won't do much good—jes' as happened today. So, knowin' as how I'd git the blame anyway in case I lost the bullion, I arranged with my brother fer to make me a dummy brick that'd come as close to the real thing in looks, feel an' heft, that nothin' short o' sawin' it in two would give the joke away. Ever since then, ma'am, all the gold that was shipped from the mine has made the trip to Juneau in the bilge 'stead of in the safe. 'Twarn't reg'lar, I allows, but it sure helped some today."

For some time after the skipper had finished, Mrs. Spiker sat pensively staring at the whirling flywheel in front of her, her softened features expressing a mixture of shame and regret. The realization of her own unwarranted and stupid interference in the affairs of the mine had evidently struck home at last. Meekly she turned to the little man.

"What a cat you must think me, Captain! Can you ever forgive me for the things I said to you this morning?"

"Oh, shucks, missus! Why make a fuss about nothin'?" He dismissed it with a broad sweep of his hand. "I'm glad, though, you was aboard when this happened, 'cause I expects to put in another request for guards. It stands to reason that I can't work my dummy brick scheme a second time; an' besides, Whiskers is likely to bear me a grudge for the bum trade he made."

Once more he produced his recovered treasure and eyed it fondly.

Mrs. Spiker, watching him with an indulgent, motherly smile, gently took the watch from him and commented:

"A great watch that, Captain, and certainly worth your struggle to get it back. There's only one thing amiss with it, that I can see."

"What—what's wrong?" The skipper held his breath in alarm.

"It needs a chain, a chain worthy of such a valuable watch," she affirmed with a twinkle in her eyes. "When we get to Juneau this afternoon you and I will pay a visit to the Nugget Shop, where I want you to pick out the finest watchchain they have in stock."

ANNOUNCEMENT

IN accordance with popular request, ADVENTURE will appear in an enlarged format, beginning in June. Read this issue's Campfire for further details.

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

A NOTE from Donald Barr Chidsey, sent in by him to accompany his story, "The Knight of the Bar Sinister," in this issue:

Elizabeth, New Jersey

Fighting, I suppose, will always be a more or less personal matter with a lot of men. But war isn't. Not any more, anyway. But it used to be; and that's the idea I was trying to get across in "The Knight of the Bar Sinister."

In the very old days men would fight other men just because they didn't like 'em. The best reason in the world, probably. The most human reason, at least. They fought for themselves, then. Later they got to fighting for their barons or counts; and later still for their districts, for their nations, which grew larger and larger, less and less personal. Eventually, I suppose, when men fight it will be only for Abstract Principles.

Or perhaps eventually they won't fight at all. But your bones and mine will have achieved the fine powder stage long before *that* time arrives!

An exception—the first great exception in the Western World—was, of course, the Crusade movement. It would be more emphatically an exception if it had really been one movement, and if the ideals which inspired it, or were supposed to have inspired it, had been sustained. In fact, of course, the Crusades were not one war, but dozens of wars, hundreds of them. Nor was it always, or even usually, a simple case of Christians against Saracens, as many romantic-minded persons still suppose. You picked your side chiefly as circumstances suggested; and circumstances usually suggested what would be best for your purse and the condition of your neck. The banner that floated in the breeze above you had very little to do with the case.

—DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

TO THEIR bookshelves *Adventure* readers may add two novels which recently received a most popular reception when serialized in our magazine. The Century Company, which has just brought out "The Devil's Passport" by Gordon Young has widely publicized the book as the best mystery story they've published in years. And with respect to William MacLeod Raine's Australian novel, "The Broad Arrow," lately published by Doubleday, Doran, we can say with the author that the novel is the high-water mark of all the fine books he has published in his many years of writing.

EDMUND S. WHITMAN hopes that his recent story (April 1st) in our pages has not given us a wrong impression about the integrity of Latin-American lotteries.

New York, New York

In "Old Hutch & Free Silver" my friend Hutch found a Central American lottery off color—but it may have been no more than a reflection of his own shady character. What I do mean is that Latin American lotteries by and large are absolutely on the square, and I want to get that across to *Adventure* readers. A couple of years ago I took sound movies of the drawing of the monthly lottery in Havana. The first prize was $100,000, and there were any number of prizes from $100 on up to plenty pay off the mortgage on the old homestead . . . and then some.

IN one wire cage were balls numbered for every ticket. In other cage were balls bearing various figures everywhere from $100 on up to the $100,000 ball. The contents of both cages were first checked by a committee and then they were inverted and whirled until the balls were seething like marbles in a bag. Then two orphan boys, standing by levers, released a ball from each simultaneously. One would call out the number on the ball while the other would read aloud the sum of money recorded on his ball. The two balls (perforated) would then be threaded on wires and every ten pairs locked and hung up for the world to see. When all the prize balls had been released and paired with an equal amount of numbered balls the show would be over. Absolutely no way to go astray. Any person could come and check his number to see if he were entitled to a prize. If so, all he had to do was present his ticket and get his money. If not, there was nothing to kick about.

The same system is followed by most of the republics of the American tropics where lotteries are legal—and that covers a lot of ground south of the Rio Grande!

—EDMUND S. WHITMAN

SUFFICIENT time has now elapsed, since the reduction in price and size of *Adventure*, to enable us to offer, as many of you suggested, a cross-section of readers' opinions relating to the change. The following letters, a few of the hundreds received, are being published to serve in such a manner. The ratio, pro and con the change, of opinion expressed has been maintained as carefully as possible in the letters selected; and numerically as well as in content they may be said to be fairly representative.

New York, New York

It is with real regret that I see your current issue has been reduced to ten cents and the size of the book curtailed.

I read with interest your remarks at the end of Camp-fire relative to the change. It may be possible that your circulation has suffered in these times and that it is good business to reduce the price.

There will be, however, hundreds of your readers who will feel the way I do. For years, your magazine has been the only means for me to taste of the far flung places which circumstance has never let me visit in person, and in these troubled months I have been able to forget daily worries in your pages. I am sorry I will have less to read per issue from now on.

It has always been my opinion that the book was worth more than the price of twenty-five cents, and I hope you will get enough protests to make it advisable to return to the old order.

—F. W. RANDEBROCK

Delavan, Wisconsin

For a number of years I have been a regular reader of *Adventure*—each issue—from cover to cover. I am quite disappointed to notice you have reduced the price to ten cents. Heretofore you have had a magazine well worth twenty-five cents. The Sept 1st issue at ten cents has sixty-four pages less than the Aug. 15th issue. And undoubtedly you will cut the calibre of contents down proportionately. Why you should want to put this publication in competition with dime novels is beyond me. Certainly it will not help the enviable position which *Adventure* once enjoyed.

Perhaps you don't realize it, but *Adventure* is read by many of the leading men in public life of America. Only a month or so ago as I was boarding my train at the Pennsylvania Station in New York, I met ex-Governor Pinchot with a copy of *Adventure* tucked under his arm.

Reducing the price to ten cents may increase your circulation some, but I doubt if you will hold many of your present readers, particularly if you reduce the number of stories per issue and lower your editorial standards.

—R. M. MACDONALD

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

I must confess that I do not enjoy the magazine as much as I did before you cut it down in size, as your serials are too short in each number and there is not enough reading matter. As I have been a subscriber for the best part of twenty years, I am taking the liberty to make this criticism to you.

THEODORE LEBOUTILLIER, M.D.

Swarthmore, Pennsylvania

In my opinion the quality of *Adventure* has been raised since the reduction in size and price. Formerly, some of the stories included, while I termed them good, were of a nature which I must term borderline. They were good enough, but not as good as the balance of the magazine. Most of your stories in the October issues should be termed very good or excellent. Therefore, I must state again, that in my opinion, your action of reducing price and size of *Adventure* has resulted in a definite improvement in quality.

—CHARLES E. HESS

Norristown, Pennsylvania

Now hard times are with us
And you hear the folks wail
That depression is hanging
Right onto our tail.
But please bear with me
For a bit of your time
While I put in my kick
On *Adventure* a dime:

I've read and enjoyed it
For sixteen long years—
Friel, Young and Tuttle
Lamb, Mundy and Spears;
And, with scores of others,
Along with my pipe,
I've passed away many
Long hours at night.

And though they're still with us,
The stories the same,
The book seems a stranger;
Adventure has changed.
I start at the front,
And alas and alack,
In a couple of hours
I'm through to the back!

While it might be in keeping
With the present times
I don't like *Adventure*
That sells for a dime.
For while quality's there
The quantity's low,
So give me *Adventure*
At two-bits a throw!

—JOS. H. LEVIS

Cincinnati, Ohio

Please—if you value the fine reputation *Adventure* has always enjoyed, if you hope to attract new customers and retain your old friends—please stop putting it on the newsstands in its latest flabby form. Of all the pulp-paper fiction magazines on the market, *Adventure* has always been at the top, due to its fine table of contents and to the distinctive cover designs and the neat, bulky and somewhat stiff form in which it was brought out.

I have been reading *Adventure* since September, 1914, and only regret that I have not been able to retain all the old issues, as the finest adventure tales in the world have been published in this magazine. There are but two magazines that I hold to be par excellence, and they are the *National Geographic* in the non-fiction field and *Adventure* in the fiction field.

I do not question your motive or your sincerity in your latest decision, but I can not help but echo John H. Frederick's belief, that it is the beginning of the end for *Adventure*—unless you bring it back to the fine standard you have heretofore maintained. You could have reduced it to 20c per copy, or one copy a month at 25c, if you felt reduction was necessary, cut out one or possibly two short stories and still maintained the appearance without departing so radically and making a rag out of the magazine. I am bitterly disappointed in its present form, even though the contents are still made up of our favorite authors. I defy any one to produce a magazine that had a better appearance than your July 1st and 15th issues or the May 1st or August 1st, 1931 issues.

I hope you will see fit to reconsider your unfortunate decision.

—EDWARD F. MEDOSCH

Macon, Georgia

I want to offer a complaint and, also, what I hope to be constructive criticism.

I have read your magazine for fifteen years—never missing a copy—and for the price I paid, it was well worth it. I once heard a professor of English at Williams College say that *Adventure* was the hardest magazine in the country to get to accept a story—which was what I wanted it to be.

However, your last announcement of policy, your change of price, leads me to believe that *Adventure* is going the way all other magazines have recently. Any man with business sense can understand that it is impossible to produce a magazine of the quality that you have maintained throughout for the sum you are asking today.

—TELFORD LEWIS, JR.

Greenwood, Massachusetts

I bought a copy of the first *Adventure*, No. 1, Volume I. I believe I have bought every number since, although when it was published three times a month I fell behind in my reading and did not read them all. I might have missed a copy or two at that time, but I do not think so, as I had a stack of the magazines around the house for a long time waiting to be read.

I have at times read copies of the Wild and Woolies that we could get for ten cents and never thought of suggesting that you reduce your price. I felt I was getting my money's worth. Quality and quantity. I sure hope the change in price does not presage any relaxation of literary standards in the selection of its contents. It seems to me that those writers whose stories I meet elsewhere do inferior work when writing for other magazines.

Now I wish you all the luck in the world in your new policy so long as your stories keep up to the mark in interest, but if they drop to the level of the rest of the Wild and Woolies I'll be saving a quarter every month. I can bear the reduction in quantity if the quality keeps up.

—M. H. TUTTLE

Killam, Alberta, Canada

I wish to object, as most of your readers here do, to the new size of *Adventure*. Since your change of price *Adventure* has been getting smaller and smaller; at first 106 pages now only 92 as compared with the former 192. It does not give one a good evening's reading.

When I saw the present issue I felt so indignant that I asked the news dealer to cancel my reservation, though when the next issue comes out I may weaken and buy another copy, it will

never be the companion of old again.

—J. J. DOBRY, M.D.

Los Angeles, California

After giving the new *Adventure* a careful once-over, the thought struck me that it is the biggest magazine bargain I know about. It's getting so a thin dime can really buy worthwhile things all by itself. I sincerely hope that thousands of new readers agree with me.

You have kept all the trimmings intact, which is a good idea. The Camp-fire and Ask Adventure would be missed more than anything else if they were omitted. I read these features first. The cover design and art headings haven't been slighted—but why go on? You and your staff must have burned the midnight oil while mulling over this "major operation" on *Adventure*. Don't see how in the world any one can say you didn't do a good job. —VICTOR L. JONES

THE majority opinion, then, is overwhelmingly in favor of a larger *Adventure*. Even at this stage, the publishers and staff, no less than the most loyal of you, wish that *Adventure* at twenty-five cents were still feasible. Speaking as one who has piloted the magazine through the last three years, who has devoted eight years to its service, I have regretted the necessity of change quite as much as any one. But necessity there was, and is; for it has become increasingly plain to publishers in general that, in these times, a quarter for a magazine is a prohibitive price.

Adventure met the problem in the only way that seemed consistent with its long-established standards. We decided to make a proportionate cut in price and content, but resolved to suffer no let-down in the quality of what went into the smaller book. Rather, because of a more restricted inventory, our fiction might be expected to attain a higher degree of excellence than heretofore. The alternative to this procedure was of course to compensate for the reduction in price by filling our pages with third-rate stuff, or worse, to be picked up currently in the open market at the editor's own figure.

LET'S tarry on this point for a moment, for I'd like to make this as frank an exposition of the case as possible. It may be news to some, though I doubt it, that our magazine pays higher rates for its stories than any other in the field. Of course it is not for this reason alone that into the *Adventure* offices comes the cream of adventure fiction. Our Writers' Brigade is a most loyal body of men, and quite irrespective of comparative rates, the majority of them would choose to appear in our pages in preference to those of any magazine in our related field. This they have indicated too often to permit of any doubt whatsoever.

But the fact remains that as long as *Adventure* persists in printing fiction superior to that of other magazines, it can in justice only continue to pay its writers more than do other magazines. We intend to do this. But if *Adventure*, as some have pointed out, is less bulky than other periodicals at the same price, the reason must be sought here. We too might increase our bulk, but at too great a sacrifice, I'm sure most of you will agree.

THE sale of *Adventure* at ten cents has conclusively proven that our twenty-five cent price was prohibitive to many would-be readers. In good measure our circulation figures have vindicated the step we took. But on further consideration of the problem, we believe we can make *Adventure* conform more to the ideas expressed in the majority opinion of our readers: We can increase the size of *Adventure* and still keep the cost to you reasonably below the old figure.

I take this occasion therefore, to announce, that beginning in June, the magazine will be considerably enlarged to enable us to feature stories of novelette length. Instead of two serials as at present, we shall return to our old policy of running but one at a time, in appreciably longer instalments.

The price of the new *Adventure* will be fifteen cents. With its appearance the magazine will go on a monthly, instead of a bi-monthly, schedule. The latter is not a particularly unprecedented step for our magazine since, as many of you are aware, for a long period in its history, it flourished as a monthly.

Read the June issue and send in your verdict.

—A. A. P.

ASK Adventure

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Fencing

ADVICE to a swordsman short in stature.

Request:—"I am on the first fencing squad of a Connecticut prep school. My arm is rather short and I find attacking rather difficult when fencing fellows with long arms. I would be very thankful if you would give me some advice on (épée) attacking.

—WILLIAM PELLINGTON, Windsor, Connecticut

Reply, by Capt. Jean V. Grombach:—In the first place you must train yourself to move on your feet even more rapidly than the average in order to offset your lack of reach. Next you must learn to lunge in full extension and to "flesh" or rush in with your body after securing an opening. This also will serve to more than offset your lack of reach.

If you are not tall a cuff attack to the underarm or elbow of your opponent will be found most effective.

Rabbit

IT'S the "natur of the baste" to have a skin too tender for hard wear.

Request:—"I know that rabbitskin is about the least durable of furs. Does this apply to the wild Northern (snowshoe) rabbit as well as to the ordinary domestic breeds?"

—R. J. MACARTHUR, Medford, Massachusetts

Reply, by Mr. Fred L. Bowden:—As to the fur itself, it is durable and heavy enough; the thing which makes the pelt as a whole unable to stand the racket is the skin of the pelt which in all species of rabbits is notoriously thin.

The fur is thick and durable, as note the Indians of the North make up a sleeping robe of rabbitskins which is the *ne plus ultra* of sleeping gear for cold weather, light and warm. However, the red brethren do not use the rabbitskins in their original form, but cut them into strips and then braid them into three strands. These are then sewn together, making one of the most satisfactory sleeping robes the writer has ever seen.

You will readily see that they use about three times as many skins to cover the same surface in this manner, the reason being that if they used the pelts in their natural form the sleeping robe would tear much too easily. I can not explain the reason for the thinness of rabbitskins, except to state that it appears to be "the natur of the baste". If some one could through selectivity succeed in breeding rabbits with tougher skins he would have a fair sized fortune staring him right in the face.

Binoculars

WHAT makes a "night glass"—and some hints on how to select one.

Request:—"Has the night glass a property which gives the user power to see in the dark?"

—J. BROWN DAVIS, M.D, Daytona Beach, Florida

Reply, by Lieut. F. V. Greene:—There is no glass that will actually give the user power to see in the dark. Eyesight depends on reflection of light from the object transmitted to the retina so, if there is no light, there will be no vision. Many authors give one the impression that a night glass gives one the power to see in the dark; this is, however, not correct.

Binoculars or telescopes concentrate the rays of light and enlarge the objective, making it appear to be nearer. If one uses a binocular that is not too high power with a large field, provided that it is properly constructed, one will have a night glass. A three-power Galilean glass with a large field is furnished the Navigation Department aboard Naval vessels; this is particularly for night use. For day use a six-power prismatic glass, with a large field; and a ten-power prisma-

tic, smaller field, glass for long distance work in making landfalls is used.

Another test for a night glass is: With the objectives (large end) near a source of light, hold an ordinary inch scale near one of the eyepieces. The small circle of light which falls on the scale should be nearly a quarter of an inch in diameter. This circle of light is called the exit pupil, and for the most efficient results should be the same size as the pupil of the eye. When this condition exists, the binocular is transmitting exactly the maximum number of light rays that the eye can accommodate.

An exit pupil larger than the pupil of the eye is a waste of transmitted light rays, while a smaller exit pupil allows the eye to overlap, and part of its surface is not utilized. The pupil of the eye will be found to be just about a quarter of an inch in diameter; a little under, when the eye is dark-accustomed.

At night any waste of available light or of pupil surface is very objectionable. To be sure, this size does waste a narrow ring of light in the daytime when the pupils contract, but it can be spared then with much less loss of efficiency than at night. So you see there are no magic properties to night glasses. It simply depends on selecting the proper glass for the purpose.

If there is no light, there will be no vision. Even on the darkest nights there will be certain rays of light that will help a little, as a general thing. There is a great difference in binoculars, and there are many being sold that are worthless. One should select several glasses by test. There should be no color seen around the edge of the object or lens. Lay the glasses on some solid support, sight through one side and bring some small object into the edge of the field; then, without moving the instrument, sight through the other side. The object should appear in exactly the same position in the field, regardless of the hinge angle. Repeat the test with several different positions of the hinge. Look, for instance, at a distant smokestack. The details, such as the mortar between the bricks, should show up clearly and sharply.

Now to select one for a night glass: Having chosen several pairs by the first test, train them in turn on some distant object at twilight. As it grows darker the image grows dimmer and dimmer, probably disappearing in some of the selected glasses before it does in others. Eliminate those which lose the object until there is but one pair left. This will be the best for night use.

Radio

TO TRANSMIT from a boat you must pass a Morse code test.

Request:—"I am after information about short wave radio sets adaptable for use on a small boat. Does a set exist that can be used from any part of the world with fair clearness?"

—WARD LEVVA, San Francisco, California

Reply, by Mr. Donald McNicol:—If the boat has no electric power for lights, you would have to use a dry battery outfit. If you do not intend to transmit, you would not require a permit. I inclose diagram of a good four-tube battery receiver which you could make up or have some radio shop make up for you. Of course, often it is less expensive to buy a made up set.

You could not get a permit to operate a transmitting outfit unless you were proficient in the Morse code.

A good book is Radio Amateur's Hand Book, published by T. Y. Crowell & Co. Costs $2 I think.

Cavalry

TWO troops that fared badly in the Mexican expedition of 1916.

Request:—"Can you tell me anything about the annihilation of the United States Cavalry squadron at Carrizal, Mexico, during the Mexican invasion of 1914?

The command, number of troops on both sides, and the reason for the combat?"

—ODEN L. CARRICK, Newport News, Virginia

Reply, by Capt. Glen R. Townsend:—The fight at Carrizal occurred on June 21st, 1916, between some 75 officers and men of Troops C and K of the 10th Cavalry under the command of Captain Boyd, and some 400 Carranza troops. The clash occurred when the Americans attempted to pass through the town in order to carry out a reconnaissance they had been directed to make. In the encounter, which lasted about two hours, the Americans lost 2 officers (Captain Boyd and Lieutenant Adair) killed; 11 enlisted men killed or missing; 1 officer (Captain Morey) and 10 enlisted men wounded, and 23 enlisted men taken prisoner. The Mexicans reported their losses: 12 officers and 33 enlisted men killed and 53 wounded.

The surviving Americans escaped from the battlefield in small groups, and some of them wandered through the desert country several days before the two troops engaged were finally reunited and reorganized.

Swim

HOW to develop a leg drive as a part of the crawl.

Request:—"1. In swimming the modern crawl is the emphasis placed on the downward or upward part of the leg action?

2. Aren't some of the most recent speed swimmers using a slight bend in the knee, in the crawl leg action, contrary to the stiff-leg teachings of a few years ago?"

—WM. FERINDEN, Jersey City, New Jersey

Reply, by Mr. L. deB. Handley:—1. An analysis of the individual unit of the crawl leg drive, the simultaneous upward motion of one leg and downward of the other, from full opening to full opening, shows it constitutes a complete scissoring kick, drive and recovery included.

The legs propel as they close, until they meet; they are in recovery after passing, as they again spread to gain full opening.

It will be obvious to you, therefore, that the first half of the scissor should be executed with

both legs whipping vigorously, one upward, the other downward, and the next half with both legs in relaxation. To emphasize either the upward or downward motion is to give the action an unbalanced and ineffective rhythm.

There need be no effort, however, to consciously differentiate between drive and recover. If the legs are just used naturally they will unwittingly distribute energy to best advantage.

2. No competent teacher ever advocated a stiff, straight-leg thrash. The action must be free, not tense, and this can be achieved only by allowing for a little play (bending) at knees and ankles.

Mining

CLEANING flour gold at a placer claim.

Request:—"I am interested in some placer ground in Colorado. We have found some very fine gold, but it seems we lack the proper knowledge as to how to work this ground, because we lose the fine gold. Can you tell me how to save it?"

—R. ROBT. SHANK, Chicago, Illinois

Reply, by Mr. Victor Shaw:—Placer miners save flour gold very often by tacking burlap or common blanketing under the riffles of the sluice boxes. At cleanup the burlap is taken up and dried thoroughly, then burned over a container and the ashes treated with "quick" when panned.

Something of this sort is also done with very fine gold coming from stamps or rolls of a reduction mill. The device is called by miners a "rag plant". It is merely a set of large sluice boxes having rough heavy canvas, burlap or blanketing for the bottoms, which catches and retains the flour gold washed over it. The cleanup is made in the same manner as described above. You could try this out with an experimental box at first; say a box built of inch stock about fifteen feet long by twelve inches square, inside. Lead your tails, or pulp, into this box with just enough water-head to carry on the sand and gravel. Not too much flow, as it would tend to wash the gold out too. If necessary, put in common cross riffles with the burlap beneath. Riffles measure 2x2 inches set 3-4 inches apart. Water should carry on the gravel, but not create any "boil" at the riffles.

Shotgun

FOR ducks a 12-gage, full choke.

Request:—"I take the liberty of asking your advice on the choice of shotguns for duck-hunting with the possibility of getting wild turkey. I have tried a .410, a 12-gage double barrel and a 16-gage cylinder bore as well as a 20-gage full choke."

—J. F. MOLONEY, Monterey, Mexico

Reply, by Mr. John B. Thompson:—The most satisfactory gun for your duck-hunting is a 12-gage, full choke. There is but a small bit in favor of 12 over 16. No gun, save by accidental heavy shot, will shoot effectively at a hundred yards. This is obvious. I use a 20 all the time, and do not consider it an ideal gun for ducks, but it sure stops turkeys at reasonable ranges. Have tested out many .410's, find them fairly satisfactory up to 30 yards. On ducks heavily feathered in late Fall, I could not stop them in full flight, with rare exceptions, beyond twenty-five yards.

The Ask Adventure section on the *West—Part 1* (California, Utah, Arizona) is now vacant.

And we have not yet filled the vacancy on *Old Songs* (comprising American folk songs, cowboy songs, sea chanteys, railroad and army songs, etc.).

Readers who feel that they are fully qualified to cover either of these sections are invited to state their qualifications by letter to the Managing Editor, *Adventure,* 161 Sixth Avenue, New York City.

THE ASK ADVENTURE SERVICE is free, provided self-addressed envelop and FULL POSTAGE for reply are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries must enclose International Reply Coupons, which are exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.

Send each question *direct* to the expert in charge of the section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **Do Not** send questions to this magazine. Be definite; explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question. The expert will in all cases answer to the best of his ability, but neither he nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. **No Reply** will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing or for employment. Ask Adventure covers outdoor opportunities, but only in the way of general advice.

A complete list of the "Ask Adventure" experts appears in the issue of the fifteenth of each month

THE TRAIL AHEAD—THE NEXT ISSUE OF *ADVENTURE*, MAY 15th

Harold Lamb gives us
"THE GOLDEN HORDE"

Do you remember his "Rusudan" and "White Falcon"? This characteristic *Adventure* author, who gained international renown with his book "The Crusades", part of which appeared in our pages, returns to us with a glamorous story in his earlier manner: The adventures of Nial, Crusader's son, whose sole possessions were his sword and his word. And how both served him in his search for the Green Lion, emerald of the Caliphs—a quest that led him even to the forbidden city of the Golden Horde, under whose gilded domes was stored the treasure stripped from a thousand palaces . . .

Begin this fine two-part story in this issue.

And These Other Good Stories

IN THE TRADITION, a story of the windjammer sailors, by ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN; THE STAMPED CRIME, a mystery-detective story by ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON; SONG IN MAHRATTI, a story of the British army in India, by PERRY ADAMS; THE BREAKER OF BRYNAS, a story of the Vikings, by MALCOLM WHEELER-NICHOLSON; WHEN A MAN BELONGS, a story of life on the Mississippi, by RAYMOND S. SPEARS; and Part II of RIFLED GOLD, a novel of the West, with Hashknife and Sleepy, by W. C. TUTTLE.

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